The Paris Review

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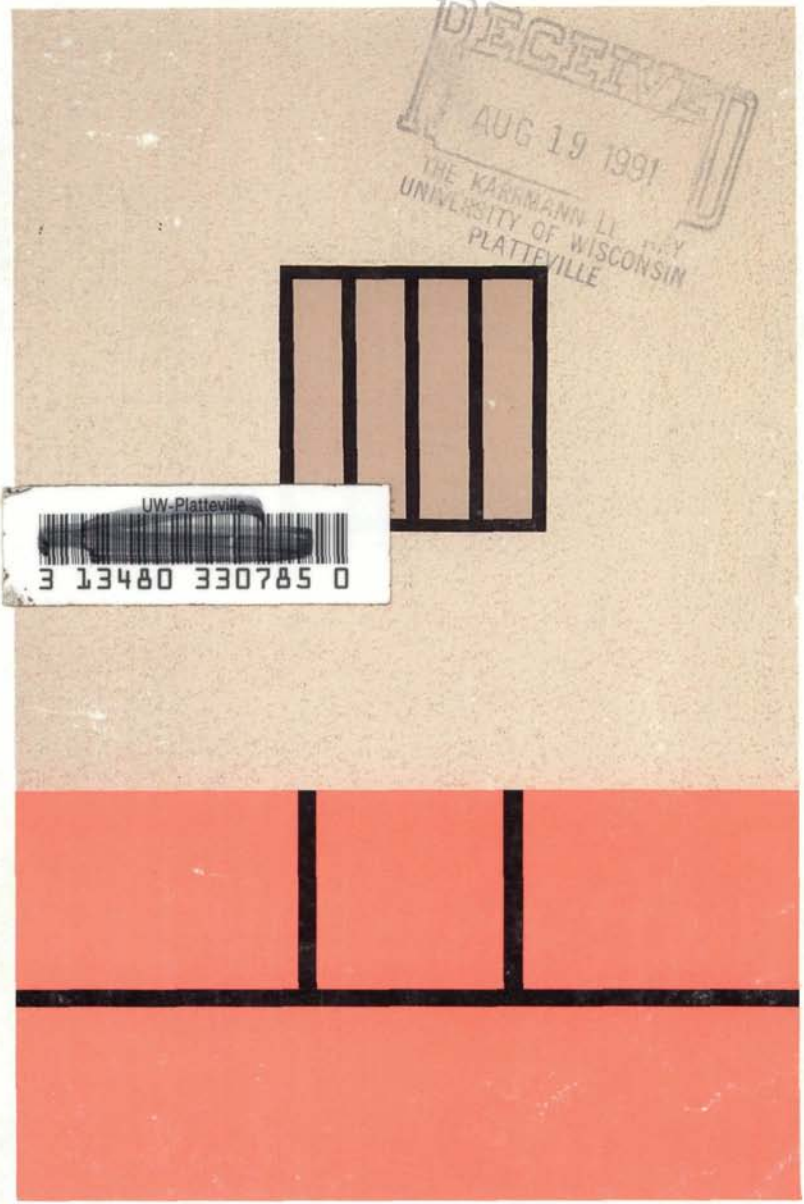
Mary McCarthy Feature



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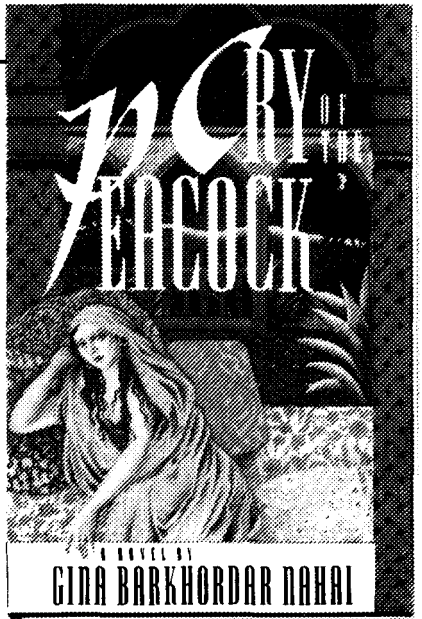

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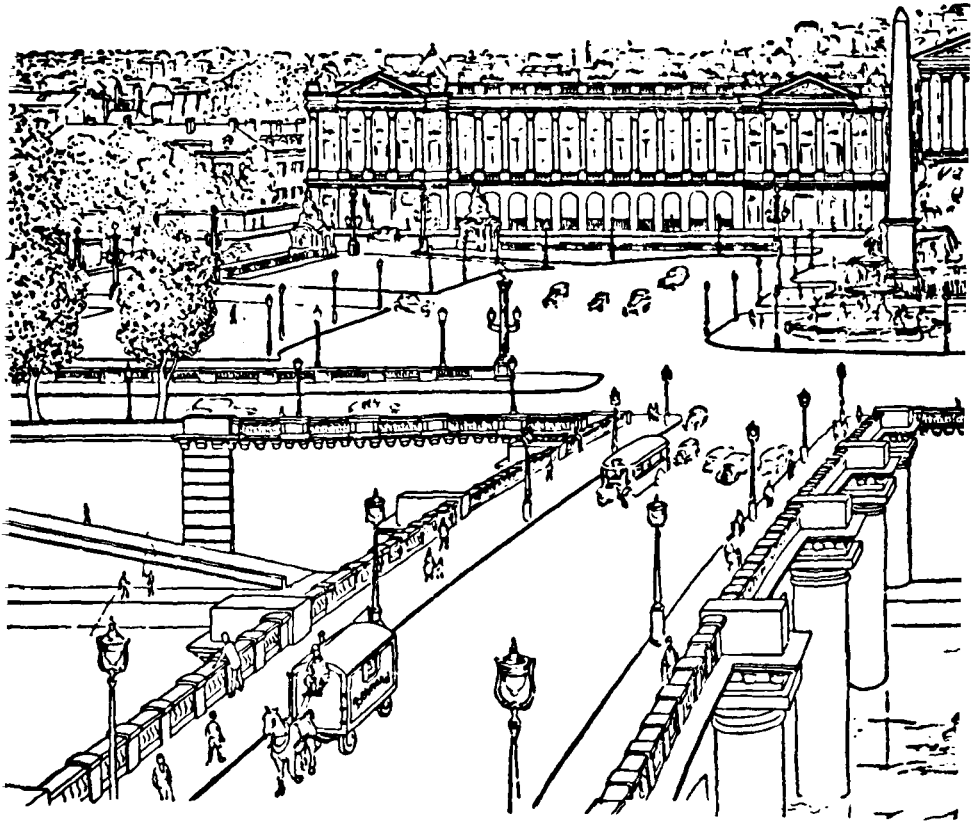

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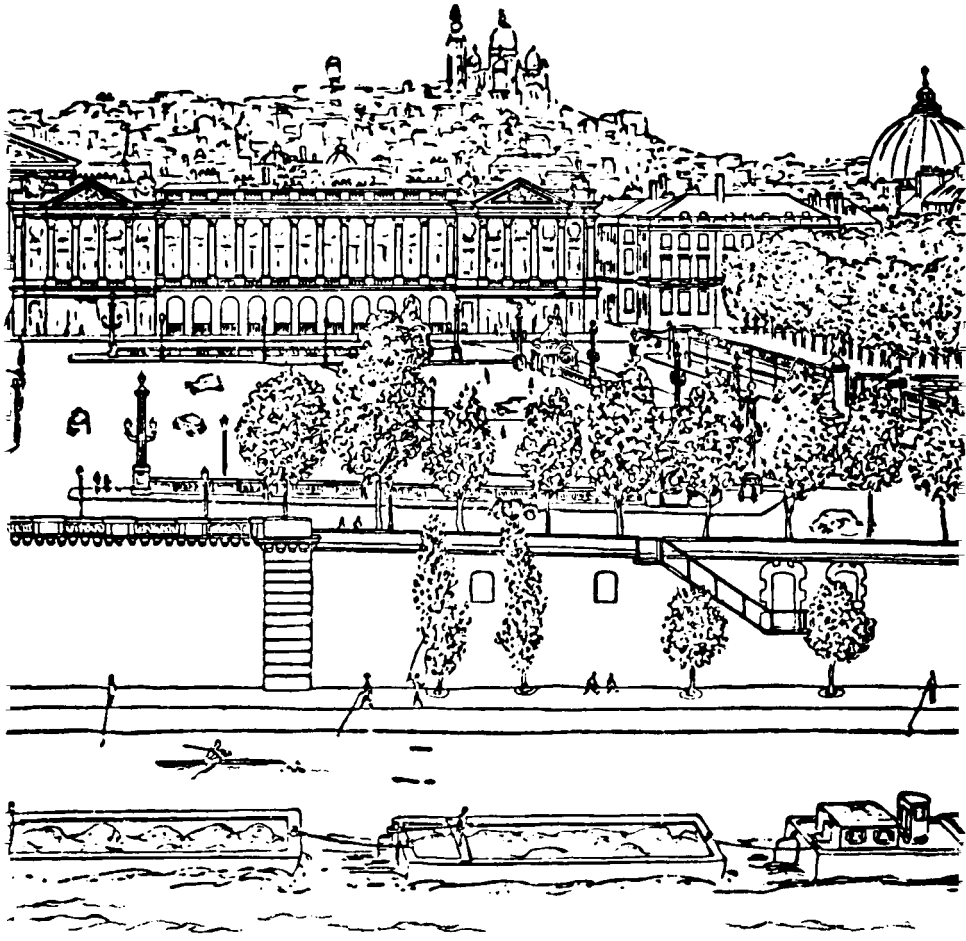

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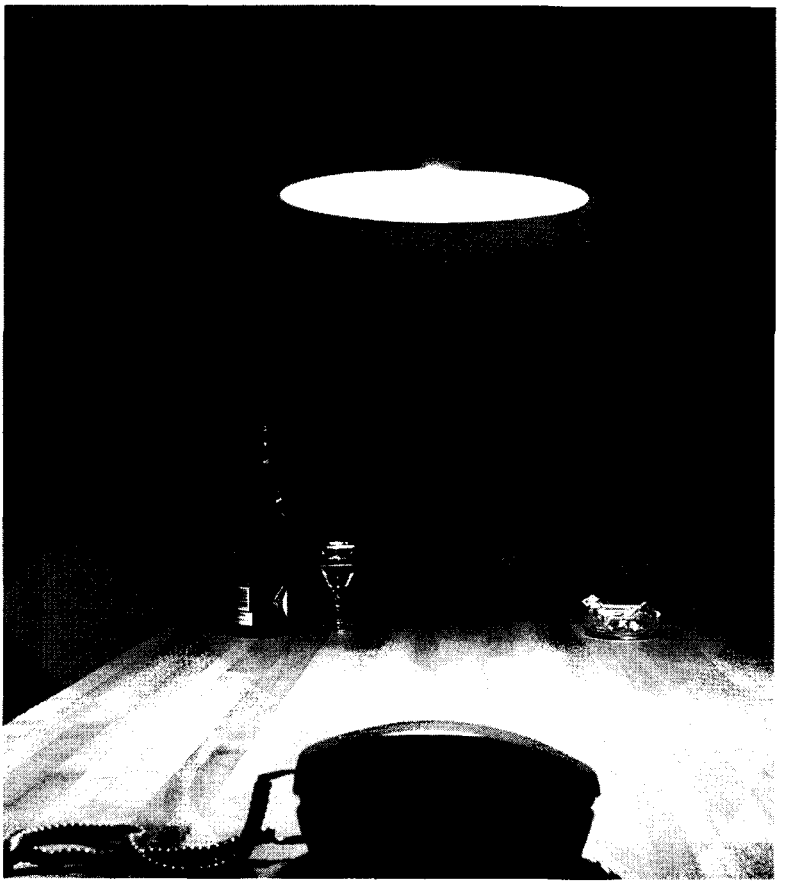

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Edmund Wilson

Mary McCarthy

Mary McCarthy was working on the second volume of her "intellectual autobiography" when she died in October 1989. The first volume, which chronicles her life from age thirteen through her years at Vassar and her brief marriage to an actor immediately after graduation, is entitled How I Grew. *The title jokingly suggested for the sequel was . . .* And Grew.

Mary had a "first reading" contract with The New Yorker, *which had published two of the chapters from the first volume but had not taken the first two chapters of the second volume. One always wonders why the work of a brilliant and famous author is turned down. In Mary's case, the reasons are*

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not complicated. As a prose stylist, she has few peers. It is disconcerting, therefore, to read passages in the autobiography that forgo polish and acerbic wit in order to recall an event or relationship with the greatest possible factual and emotional accuracy. At moments, the narrator seems hesitant, even awkward in her efforts (. . . it may have happened this way . . . I am quite sure . . . not certain. . . .) *but she has clearly adopted a speculative approach as a sort of sub-style, for the bright beacon of her critical apparatus is on herself now and the integrity of her recollections. So although the McCarthy sparkle, candor and hilarity are very much at play, there is a new note of diffidence, of vulnerability.*

Mary remarked that the chapter on Edmund Wilson (the third chapter) would be the most difficult for her to write. It was a relief to her when she finished it. The day before she was moved from her room at New York Hospital to the intensive care unit, she told a friend that the Wilson chapter was at The New Yorker. *She was never to know it had been rejected, nor that, in the upheaval of moving offices, it was lost for over a year.*

Margo Viscusi, one of the trustees of her literary estate and a former secretary as well as a good friend, says Mary usually made copies. But Mary was very trusting, and might well have sent the only copy off in those final days at Bard College when she was overwhelmed with work, her usual busy social life and ill health. Mrs. Viscusi also believes that Mary left no unpublished writing, except for notes she made for a book she hoped to write on Gothic architecture. She kept no journals and left no incomplete first drafts. Everything she wrote has been published, except for this last "lost" chapter about one of the most celebrated literary marriages of the century.

The following narrative picks up from the preceding chapter which concludes in October 1937 with the young McCarthy, along with the staff of the newly revived Partisan Review, *nervously waiting for Edmund Wilson to drop by.*

"All of us were on hand for the big occasion; we were hoping to get something from him for our first or second number and we wanted to make a good impression. . . ."

—D.S.P.

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He bustled into our office, short, stout, middle-aged, breathy—born May 8, 1895; we others were in our twenties—with popping reddish-brown eyes and fresh pink skin, which looked as though he had just bathed. Perhaps it was this suggestion of baths—the tepidarium—and his fine straight nose that gave him a Roman air. I think he was wearing a gray two-piece suit and a white shirt.

We walked to the Union Square restaurant and took a table on the second floor, above the cafeteria. I was the only woman, but Wilson did not seem to notice me specially. He talked mainly to Dwight [Macdonald] and Fred [Dupee]. Somebody asked for our drink order. We were all, except for Dwight perhaps, nervous and tongue-tied, and a drink would have helped. But Wilson shook his head irritably, as though annoyed by the proposal, and we all meekly followed suit. Probably he didn't drink and disapproved of the habit. Maybe one of the boys had the courage to order a beer.

That is all I recall of this first meeting. Of course I remembered him from Vassar in my junior year—the year after *Axel's Castle*—when he had read a paper on Flaubert with such alarming pauses that Miss Sandison, who had introduced him, had run down to the basement in Avery to find him a glass of water: *"Vox exhaurit in faucibus."* Now he showed more aplomb as we talked about the new, anti-Stalinist *Partisan Review* and what we were going to have in our first issues. He agreed that we ought to have something by Trotsky, if we could get it. He may have tried to interest us in his friend Paul Rosenfeld, to be our music critic. We spoke of André Gide and his revised view of the USSR, exemplified in a piece I was translating for our second number. Wilson had read it in French, he said, cutting the subject off. As I later learned, he did not think much of Gide. The conversation turned

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to *Travels in Two Democracies,* which had described his own trip to Russia, contemporaneous with Gide's. The title showed how far he had come politically in a little more than a year; that book had been published in 1936. He could no longer call Russia a democracy unless ironically—the trials had happened in between. Essentially his book belonged to the epoch of the Kirov assassination, and perhaps he was slightly embarrassed by his failure to see ahead.

Over lunch, his voice was light and pleasant; this was not one of his booming days. He was always at his best when he was bookish. By the time we separated, he had promised us a piece for our first number.

The following week Margaret Marshall called me at Covici. She had heard from Wilson, who wanted to take us out to dinner, the two of us. She supposed it was because of the *Nation* series, in which he had been singled out for praise. If so, it seemed odd that he had waited two years, I thought. Peggy, who had met him, was being coy about why he was asking us both, when he "kind of" liked her, she was sure. Perhaps he wanted chaperonage, I suggested lightly. For my part, I could not guess what was in his mind. The whole thing seemed very strange. But if Wilson was "after" one of us, it must be me, I reasoned, since he had just met me in the *PR* office. Fred and the boys puzzled over the invitation, too, when they learned of it. I wondered—maybe we all wondered—whether Wilson knew that I was Philip's girl.

As the date for the dinner approached, my coeditors did quite a bit of worrying and wondering. Yet nobody, including Philip [Rahv], thought I should decline. With our high ambitions for the magazine, we could not consider that. Instead, we worried about me. The boys did not hide their fear that my political inexperience could make the magazine look foolish to that experienced older critic who knew such a great deal about Marxism and the U.S. social scene. And I was literary in the wrong way, not really *modern,* still interested in graduate-student stuff like Shakespeare and the Elizabethans. I was not as big

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Mary McCarthy.

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a liability as George Morris—going into the Workers Bookstore and asking for a copy of Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed,* wearing spats and carrying a cane! He had been curious to read it, he said, having heard so much talk about it in the office, and had thought that a neighborhood bookstore with "Workers" in the name would be a good place to find it, never dreaming that it was the official Party place. Even after hearing this explanation, the boys were aghast. I knew better than that, of course, but I was politically undeveloped, prone to wonder whether the Czar and his family *needed* to be killed. Clearly it nettled my fellow editors that I had been singled out to represent the magazine—why not one of *them?* With their excitable apprehensions, most evident in Philip and William, they were making me fearful myself of what I might say or do. There could be no reprieve: Wilson had called Margaret Marshall again to confirm the date and tell us to meet him at Mary's—an Italian restaurant deep in the Village known to his generation.

At this point Fred Dupee came to my rescue. As it looked as if the great critic did not drink, I would need some bucking up for the ordeal ahead, he decided, seeing me white and strained in my "dinner dress," when I stopped by the office for a last-minute briefing. So he took me to the Hotel Albert bar, on University Place, and ordered daiquiris, my favorite cocktail at the time. I must have had three.

Wilson and Peggy were already at Mary's, in an upstairs private dining room. Far from not drinking, he was ordering a second round of double manhattans when I arrived. Naturally I took one, then a second, without saying that I had already had drinks with Fred. But if I had, it would have made no difference. Wilson was in a bibulous mood. And I learned why he had said no to drinks before lunch that day in the Union Square restaurant: he had had a colossal hangover, and the hair of the dog was not one of his weaknesses.

His habit, as I came to know, was to get thoroughly

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soused (which we were on our way to doing at Mary's), then sleep it off and turn over a new leaf the next day on arising. Bathed and shaved, clad in snowy linen—he wore BVDs—he emerged from his toilet reborn, or like a risen god. That he did not smoke probably helped. The glowing pink man we had taken to lunch was a resurrected Wilson, who had harried hell the night before. The boys, who had read *I Thought of Daisy* (I had not), might have guessed that the respected critic was no teetotaler.

After the double manhattans, we drank dago red and finally B&B. This was a favorite potion with Wilson, which I never came to like; for me, the sweetness of the benedictine spoiled the taste of the brandy. All that liquor loosened my tongue, and I had what was called a talking jag. Since Wilson seemed interested, I told them the story of my life: Seattle, the flu, the death of my parents, Minneapolis, and certainly quite a bit of Uncle Myers, not omitting, I fear, the razor strop. . . . Then, somehow, we were at the Chelsea Hotel, on West 23rd Street. Possibly we had dropped in on Ben Stolberg, who was living there at the time. I was no longer very conscious of Margaret Marshall, but she was still one of the party. Fairly soon, I hope, I "passed out."

As I learned the next day, my inert form put them in a quandary. Neither Peggy nor Wilson knew where I lived. Ben Stolberg would not have known either. If they had tried looking in the phone book, they would not have found me—Philip and I had only recently moved in. Wilson, though no doubt very drunk, rose to the occasion. He took a room for himself—he was living in the country, near Stamford—and another for Margaret and me.

Opening an eye the morning after, I looked cautiously across to the next bed, having assessed that I was in a twin-bedded room. With an episode like the one with the man in the Brooks Brothers shirt behind me, I had reason to fear the worst. In the other bed, a yawning Margaret Marshall opened her eyes. There was no one else in the

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room, so far as I could see, and I guessed that we were in a hotel. I let a cry escape me, a loud groan or moan. It was the same awful certainty speaking that had just awakened me, like a voice in my ear: "Oh, God, oh, God, I've disgraced *Partisan Review.*" In my slip, I cried hopelessly while she looked on. Wilson must have gone back to Stamford. At any rate, we did not see him that morning. Doubtless he had paid our bill.

My first action, of course, was mandatory: call Philip. Maybe Peggy was kind enough to get the number for me when she saw how scared I was. They knew each other because he wrote reviews for her, on *The Nation,* but this was the first she knew of our living together. Anyway, while we were still in that hotel room, she talked to him. She told him that I had passed out and that Wilson, not knowing what to do with me, had persuaded her to stay with me in the Chelsea in the next bed. Philip believed her. Angry as he was, he felt pity for me. Either he came down in a taxi to get me or I took a taxi home by myself. I was still wearing my "dinner dress." Either way, he forgave me. I was horrified to think of the night he must have spent not knowing what had happened to me. Probably he blamed Fred when he heard about the daiquiris. But as the helmsman of a young, endangered periodical, he would not have allowed himself to be angry with Wilson.

Philip's capacity for forgiveness will surprise people who thought of him (and wrote of him) as a gruff, rancorous man. But it is a fact and not to be fully explained by the strong attraction between us. In another man, this could have led to a fierce, jealous resentment. But Philip had an open heart and a childish, somewhat docile nature with those he had opened it to, few as they were. That he could accept my penitence—and not from any weakness—must have meant that he understood that I loved him. I did, and still do, vividly, as I write these words. Real love, said Hannah Arendt, is mutual. It is something that happens between two people. After much reflection, I agree with that. The other thing, the thing you read

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about in Proust, is *infatuation* (from *fatuus,* "foolish"); it is much commoner than love, and you can get over it. Years later, when Philip died and I wrote a little obituary on him, Hannah, on reading it, was astonished. "So, my dear, you loved him. I never knew." Maybe, till she said it, I had not known it myself.

Another way of reconciling the common view of Philip held by his enemies—i.e. by most of the males of the *PR* circle—with my own experience of him is that he *became* unforgiving after what I did to his childlike heart. I *hope* it is not that.

What I have to relate now is painful to tell. To put it "as in a nutshell" (as Hannah, now dead, too, used to say), Philip still had a lot of forgiving to do. I mean forgiving of me. The second occasion was another dinner with Wilson. Again he asked the two of us, as though we were wedded by our collaboration in his not very flexible mind, and again we accepted and again the scene was Mary's. Again Philip did not interpose a veto. This time I did not have daiquiris to prepare me and this time I did not pass out. Alas, no. Instead, after the B&Bs, the three of us rode in a taxi all the way to Stamford, where Wilson lived in a house he rented on the Mianus River. Fittingly, the house was named Trees. Again we did not call Philip, not, at any rate, till the next morning, when I conveyed an invitation from Wilson to take a train at Grand Central and join us. *And Philip did.*

At Trees, at one end of the colorless living room, we had a lunch cooked by an old black maid named Hattie who occupied a wing of the house with her grandchildren. Wilson was affable; probably he served liebfraumilch, his preferred table wine after Château Yquem, and we talked about books and writers. Then Philip took me home on the train. I cannot remember what happened to Margaret Marshall. Perhaps she took an earlier train back, for I do not see her sharp little face nor hear her thin voice at the lunch table. Could she have gone to see her friend and contributor Franz Hollering, who lived with his Czech movie-actress wife in a house

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McCarthy and Edmund Wilson.

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on the Eitingon property? In any event, while Miss Marshall slept in a little guest room just down the hall I had gone to bed with Wilson.

Yes. That had not been my intention when I followed him into his study (book-lined, of course) to continue, as I drunkenly thought, a conversation we were having. I greatly liked talking to him but was not attracted to him sexually. He was too old and too fat. Nevertheless, when he firmly took me into his arms, misunderstanding my intention, I gave up the battle. On the couch in the study, we drunkenly made love.

Some time before daylight, I left him and returned to the room that was supposed to be mine. I don't think I saw him alone till many days later. At breakfast, produced by Hattie, we made no reference to what had happened. I called Philip, and we waited for him to come. It was only then, I believe, that Wilson understood that I lived with Philip. When he started to write to me, it was always to the office.

One day, a bit afterward, when we were finally able to talk—I had come out to Trees on the train and we did not drink—I tried to explain to him my motives in returning to his study that night. But he would not listen to what I felt sure was the truth; only facts spoke to him, and the fact was that I had let him make love to me. Again, I gave up. You cannot argue against facts. And yet to this very day I am convinced that he had me wrong: I only wanted to talk to him. The reader will find an echo of this in Chapter 5 of *A Charmed Life,* where Martha Sinnott, happily remarried, looks back on her first husband, the awful Miles Murphy: "She did not understand what had happened. She had only, she bemoaned, wanted to talk to him—a well-known playwright and editor, successful, positive, interested in her ideas and life history." (Let the reader be warned: *A Charmed Life,* though derived, like all books, from experience, is not an autobiographical novel, and Miles Murphy must not be taken for a disguised portrait of Wilson. Martha, I admit, is a bit like

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me—I tried to change her and failed, as I failed later with Domna Rejnev in *The Groves of Academe.*) Maybe, when I wrote *A Charmed Life* I was fooling myself about Martha's motives and am still fooling myself today, when I should be old enough to know better, about what drove me into Wilson's study on that long-ago night. At present, my guess is that it was the unwillingness to end an evening that gets hold of people who have been drinking—*anything,* sex included, to avoid retiring. But that is a far cry from Wilson's fond persuasion.

Whatever the truth was, that I did not confess to Philip what had happened during that night at Trees indicated that a relation with Wilson was beginning. The two of us had a secret between us, and Philip became the outsider. In my office at Covici, sitting opposite the ever-disapproving Miss Broene, I embarked on a correspondence with Wilson. He wrote, and I answered. His letters to me are at Vassar; mine to him are at Yale. Reading mine over, I am surprised by the intimacy and friendliness of my tone. There is a note of tenderness and teasing. Apparently I liked him much more than I remember, more than I ever would again. What I hear in the letters is not love, though—I never loved Wilson—but sympathy, affection, friendship. Later, I grew to think of him as a monster; the minotaur, we called him in the family, Bowden [Broadwater] and I. The comparison is exact (he was even related to the Bull family on his mother's side), and I may have felt a kind of friendship for the poor minotaur in his maze, so sadly dependent on the yearly sacrifice of maidens. But if, sensing that need, I warmed to Wilson, solitary among his trees, I did not guess that I would be one of the Athenian maidens with never a Theseus to rescue me.

If I had no premonition of what was in store, he, on his side, was hell-bent on my marrying him. He needed a wife (to use one of his expressions) "the worst way," having lost his second, Margaret Canby, in a fall down some steep stairs five years before. The women he had

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been having affairs with were either unwilling to marry him or unsuited to the job or both. When I met him, he must have been desperate. He could not take care of himself; the old black woman, Hattie, was a kind of nurse to him. A friend used to tell a story of arriving at Trees for a call during this time and hearing Wilson's voice boom: "Hattie, Hattie! Where are my drawers?" He meant his underwear—those light lawn one-piece BVDs he wore. He was comically dependent on old-fashioned terms. His bicycle was always "my wheel." Had he owned or driven a car, it would have been "the machine." His sexual organ, as readers of *Hecate County* discovered, was "my club": "My club was pressing through the tight confines of my evening dress."

No, I did not want to marry him. As a radical, I was against marriage. What happened is explained in *A Charmed Life,* in an analysis of the motive behind Martha's first marriage. "The fatalistic side of her character accepted Miles as a punishment for the sin of having slept with him when she did not love him, when she loved, she still felt, someone else. Nevertheless she had naively sought a compromise. She had begged Miles merely to live with him, as his mistress." That was what I tried to sell Wilson on, quite nobly, I thought. But he was not interested. "I've had that," he replied, without elaboration. So finally I agreed to marry him as my punishment for having gone to bed with him—this was certainly part of the truth. As a modern girl, I might not have called that a "sin"; I thought in logical rather than in religious terms. The logic of having slept with Wilson compelled the sequence of marriage if that was what he wanted. Otherwise my action would have no consistency, in other words no meaning. I could not accept the fact that I had slept with this fat, puffing man for no reason, simply because I was drunk. No. It had to make sense. Marrying him, though against my inclinations, *made* it make sense. There is something faintly Kantian here. But I did not know Kant then. Maybe I was a natural Kantian.

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Of course, other reasons contributed. The recent death of my grandfather may have been one. It was not that Wilson stood in as a father-figure for me exactly, but he was an older man (there were seventeen years between us) and came from the same stock, Anglo-Saxon, Presbyterian. His father, like Grandpa, had been a distinguished lawyer—Attorney General of New Jersey under Woodrow Wilson as governor. There was a certain feeling of coming home, to my own people.

Then there were the intellectual attractions he offered, all of which were beyond Philip: we were going to read Juvenal together, for example. Also, there was the whole world of Nature and the outdoors, so closed to Philip. We were going to ride horses along the trails above the river; we were going to fish for trout. We would look for wild flowers in the woods: spring beauty, bloodroot, hepatica, trillium. Some of this we actually did. After we were married, we rode a few times, uninspiring horses; we caught perch and sunfish, if not trout, in the Mianus, and Edmund knew the wild flowers quite well. He taught me their names, for which I am still grateful. But we never read Juvenal.

It was an idyl he was offering me and not wholly false. He, too, must have hoped that it would be like that. Probably I was stirred by memories of Lake Crescent and the morning walk to Marymere Falls, of Major Mathews and the spring woods near Tacoma. Those had been the happiest moments of my life. Though Wilson could furnish me no waterfalls, no carpets of violets, he had a wonderful gorge, I found, just up the river, with an icy green transparent pool at the bottom. I loved that. His own anticipation must have centered on having an intellectual girl for a wife—the first one. After a protracted siege to Edna Millay, he had been "stuck on" the poet Léonie Adams. But Léonie had cared about women (Margaret Mead had been his principal rival), and now she was married to Bill Troy.

Besides the inducements of a shared classical education

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and the outdoors, he offered me the promise that marrying him would "do something" for me, that is, for my literary gift. "Rahv doesn't *do* anything for you," he argued, meaning that Rahv was slothfully content to have me do those theater columns, which, according to Wilson, were not up to my real measure. "You draw a crushing brief against a play," he said. I did not exactly see what was wrong with that, but in fact he had put his finger on a limitation. I was not as narrow as Sidney Hook but I did treat most of the authors I wrote about as though they were under indictment. The tendency, evidently, was aggravated by Trotskyism. It was Wilson's belief that I ought not to be writing criticism—I had a talent, he thought, for imaginative writing. This was the opposite of what dear Miss Kitchel had decided for me at Vassar.

Looking back, I can see that he was right where Philip was concerned. If it had been left to Rahv, I never would have written a single "creative" word. And I do not hold it against him; on the contrary. His love, unlike Wilson's, was from the heart. He cared for what I was, not for what I might evolve into. Whatever I might be *made* to be, with skillful encouragement, did not interest him. To say this today may seem hard on Wilson, as well as ungrateful on my part for what he did, in the first months of our marriage, to push me into "creativity." If he had not shut the door firmly on the little room he had shepherded me into (the same room Margaret Marshall had slept in), I would not be the "Mary McCarthy" you are now reading. Yet, awful to say, I am not particularly grateful.

At the time I was not swayed by the argument of what he, compared to Philip, could do for me. It seemed mercenary. The picture of a powerful man trying with various baits and lures to rob a weaker man of his chief treasure was not very appealing. But Wilson never saw that angle. He saw what he perceived as my self-interest, to be furthered by my marriage to him. From the outside, however, things looked different. I remember that somebody of the *PR* circle—Delmore [Schwartz] or Harold

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Rosenberg—was widely quoted as saying that Mary left Philip for Wilson because Wilson had a better prose style. I am not sure that Wilson did, or not always, and it would have been a bad reason, had it been operative, which of course it was not. My own explanation (if I must give but a single one) for my yielding to Wilson is the Marxist explanation. It was the same old class struggle that Philip and I had been waging from the moment we fell in love.

Wilson, relatively speaking, was upper class. That was all there was to it. Though he commanded a higher word rate, he was scarcely better heeled than Philip on the WPA. Wilson made more money, which he spent on taxis, liquor, long-distance phone calls. There was nothing left for clothes or furniture or jewelry, all of which I cared about. He could not do without taxis, booze, the long-distance telephone, hence regarded them in the light of necessities. Another addiction (I almost forgot) was book-binding, which was just then beginning to take hold of him. In terms of wealth, he was hard to situate. Though he could seldom pay the phone bill without hasty recourse to his mother, you could not call him poor since he always had enough to eat. Neither could you say he was rich.

One material inducement that counted in the decision I was being pressed to make was his promise that we would have children. Philip was in no position to offer that; he was still not free to marry, lacking the price of a divorce, and he was not keen on the idea of progeny even in later life, when he was free and could afford it—he never had any children. But Wilson made good on that. He took me to New York in a taxi for my lying-in, though we had no clothes of our own for the newborn. A friend gave me her baby clothes, rubber pants, and diapers; her baby scales, I think, too. Wilson's mother had to be appealed to for the baby carriage when we were leaving the hospital. Once we were back home, the Bathinette gave rise to a crisis (he thought we didn't

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need one), and I forget how we managed for a playpen. No doubt it was old Mrs. Wilson once again to the rescue.

But I am going too fast. There was a time when I had not yet agreed to marry him but was taking the train out to Stamford and the milk train back while Philip, somehow, remained in ignorance. I also met Wilson at least once for dinner in New York, and there was some question of a showing of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (his choice). As he continued to "press his suit," each time I managed a stolen meeting—once I pretended to have gone to a prize fight—I was risking the unthinkable: Philip's discovery. Possibly I hoped that the affair with Wilson would come to an end all by itself somehow, thus relieving me of having to tell Philip.

Well, finally I told him. Wilson was "at" me to do it, till one night I did. But before I go ahead with that melancholy story, I must make a confession. Since starting this chapter I have been rereading the letters I wrote on Covici-Friede Inc. stationery to "Mr. Edmund Wilson, Westover Road, Stamford, Connecticut." And they tell me, among other things, that Peggy Marshall was very much present at lunch with Wilson on that morning after at Trees. Listen to this, from my second letter, written on a "Tuesday afternoon" in reply to one from him. The postmark is November 30, 1937.

> Sunday was a bad day for me. . . . When you took Peggy on your lap, something happened to my face that I couldn't stop. Philip leaned over to me and said, "I know something about you," and I said, "I know you do," and he said, "You're jealous," and I said, "Yes." He attributed it, however, to an extreme coquettishness, and didn't look further for explanations.

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McCarthy and her son, Ruel, at their home in Wellfleet, Massachusetts.

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When he took Peggy on his lap, was he sitting at the table or was it on the sofa? Grotesque! Did he do it to throw Philip off the scent? If so, it was a good move. Incredibly, though the letters were going back and forth for more than a month and a half, right through Christmas, and I was meeting Wilson about once a week, Philip seems to have had no suspicion. How shameful a successful deception is! But maybe he was so secure in his own manhood that he was unable to think of Wilson as any kind of rival.

When at last I told him, after the first starts of surprise, he took the news very soberly. He was struck by the marriage proposal into a kind of thoughtfulness. It was as though the situation was too grave for anger. His big dark eyes with their prominent whites grew still, as if wounded. "What do you want to do, Mary?" he said gently. Probably I cried and told him that I didn't know: Wilson was in such a hurry; he was rushing me.

Obviously I don't remember the details of the conversation; probably there was more than one. Maybe I cooked our dinner in the middle of it. Or we went to bed and got up. The gist was that Philip begged me, for both our sakes, to take my time. He appeared to consider *for* me, like a more experienced brother. With Wilson, there was the age difference, he pointed out. And I was young enough to wait a while to have children. Before deciding anything I ought to talk it over with an older person, not my grandmother (she was too old) but someone who could be told that he and I were living together. Why not Nathalie Swan's mother, a society woman but rather intellectual?

Reluctantly, Wilson agreed that I could think about it. Late in January, I telephoned Mrs. Swan and went up to stay with her at the Swans' country house near Salisbury, Connecticut. Nathalie came along or followed in a day or two. Being the person I was, in the midst of my grief for Philip, I was excited by the momentousness of it all. Having such a big decision to mull over made me feel important. Mrs. Swan, no doubt, was flattered to be con-

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sulted; she was aware of Wilson as a literary figure. It did not subtract from the solemnity of the occasion to be waited on by a butler and maids, to drink Mrs. Swan's society martini (gin and two vermouths) before lunch and Joe Swan's vintage wine with meals, and to have coffee with hot milk on my breakfast tray. In other words, I enjoyed myself. It was a long time since I had stayed in the Swan country house, where everything was perfect. Meanwhile Philip waited for the result in our apartment. I don't recall where Wilson was. Probably he was besieging me with impatient telephone calls.

Mrs. Swan had the good sense to listen while remaining neutral. If she gave me any advice, it was "Wait a little longer." Yes! Precisely! But that was wise counsel I did not want to hear. To resist that advice was to precipitate myself into Wilson's arms. He understood that very well, though I did not. To this day, I can't make out whether I "really" wanted to marry Wilson or prayed to be spared it.

I took the train back from Salisbury. After that, I remember nothing till days later, when I was on the train with Edmund, going down to his mother's place in Red Bank. I had told Philip my decision, spent a few nights at Trees, had a Wassermann (or didn't you need a Wassermann in New Jersey?), quit my job, and was feeling miserable. I looked at the tall grasses outside the train window and looked the other way, into Wilson's closed face, the narrow lips set in a tight line. I do not know whether Philip and I had made love in our bed when I came back from staying at Salisbury. I hope so. Then had come the chilly day when we divided our possessions. I remember the result but not the painful event: Philip took the tall steel lamp and the tweed-covered armchair; I took some boldly designed Italian plates, my mother's silver, and the red love seat that stayed with me through two more marriages. Each took his own books. Did we have the 1911 *Britannica* or had that gone to Johnsrud?

Needless to say, Wilson and I were being married in

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a civil ceremony, at the Red Bank city hall. Our witnesses were two town employees. Afterwards we went back to Edmund's mother's house. She was a stumpy, downright old lady with an ear trumpet and a loud, deaf voice. She looked like a warthog, Bowden eventually decided, basing himself on my description and an illustration in Webster's Collegiate—he had never seen Mrs. Wilson nor an actual warthog in the flesh. But that was pretty much how she looked. Wilson inherited his body structure from her family, the Kimballs. His nose and forehead came from his father. At lunch—a pretty fruit jelly for dessert—I was introduced to Jenny, her companion, rather elderly herself, and to a cook and driver. Mrs. Wilson was in the habit of sitting all day long at a living room window of her sizeable house on Vista Place, ticking off the people that had died in the houses across the street. This was *her* house. According to Edmund, her first words on watching her husband die in the house they had always lived in were "Now I can have my new house." She was a gruff personality who did not much approve of Edmund; he believed that she held it against him that his large head had torn her vaginal tissues as he was being born. There was not much love lost between them. Yet there was a kind of grumbly, unwilling attachment. They were more alike than they knew. When Dos Passos' beautiful wife, Katy, was decapitated in an automobile accident, Edmund's first remark, made after visiting Dos in the Boston hospital, was "Now he he can get married and have some children."

He was dependent on his mother for money, as his father's estate (not large) had been left entirely to her. What Edmund saw as his rightful share she doled out to him as though it were bounty. Yet the fact was that the bulk of her capital was hers by family inheritance, wisely invested for her by a stockbroker brother, Edmund's Uncle Win. She had a good head for money and rated her brothers higher than her husband.

One of her complaints about Edmund was his prone-

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ness to marry unsuitable women. She had already brought up a child of his first marriage to the actress Mary Blair. When the little girl (according to Edmund) had been left by her mother in front of an open window while sick with the flu, he had removed her bodily to Red Bank and deposited her with his mother where she remained till now. I did not meet Rosalind on the day of our wedding because she was fifteen and away at boarding school. But her home was still Red Bank. His second wife, Margaret, was a drinker, his mother thought. And now he had married me.

After lunch, he left me to sit opposite the old lady and shout into her ear trumpet, while he himself climbed upstairs to "his" room to read or sleep. I was surprised when he did this on our first, newlywed visit, but I soon understood that it must have been his habit with all his wives: part of a wife's function was to address his mother's defective hearing. She appeared to like me well enough; the complaints she voiced to me about Edmund could be taken as a sign of friendship. I imagine that she handed him a nice check for a wedding present as we were leaving for New York. She gave me her cheek to kiss.

It had been arranged that in the evening he would meet two of my brothers in the bar of the New Weston Hotel, where we were spending our wedding night. Since neither of my brothers remembers anything of this except the fact that it happened, it looks as if it had gone all right. Kevin and Preston had come to New York from Minneapolis this January with a friend to try their luck, Kevin and the friend as actors, Preston as a photographer. They were living in a room on West 23rd Street and had very little money. It was Preston who got discouraged first and went home, where he got a little help from our Uncle Lou in Minneapolis. Kevin hung on. On the day of the meeting with Wilson, all three still had hopes.

My brothers were both good-looking boys in the

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McCarthy and Wilson on the porch in Wellfleet.

McCarthy way—dark hair, light eyes, long dark eyelashes. And of course they were shy as they talked of their plans. Wilson took no exception to them that I noticed while we were sitting with drinks—no more than two or three. But upstairs in the bedroom (this was our honeymoon), he suddenly burst out and told me my brothers were agents of the GPU. He was very drunk, more drunk than I had seen him before, and at first he did not make himself clear. He had started with innuendo, lurching on to accusation. I could not believe I was hearing right; it was some sort of joke, I guessed. When I finally knew he was serious, I was at a loss as to how to refute the charge since I could not see what had led up to it. Even now, I still have no notion. I may guess that in the bar he had sensed a plot thickening against him: I had tricked him into marriage so as to deliver him to the GPU through these brothers of mine who were

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agents. He grunted some threats, but he did not hit me. Abruptly he fell asleep. I lay awake, silently weeping. The marriage was over, I had to assume.

In a sense that was true. It was the end of my high hopes for a "classical" life. No more idyl. The next morning is a blank for me. If I confronted him with "Why did you call my brothers GPU agents?" he evaded an answer with "Come along now, we have a train to catch," or something of the sort. If I said nothing, *he* said nothing. And he never reverted to the subject. When Kevin came out to Trees that spring to ask for help, he gave him a five dollar bill. No mention to me of "Your brother, the agent." I suppose that the wedding night had brought on an access of paranoia—dread of being "tied down"? The political arena at that time was highly sensitized. We both thought in those terms. Probably he saw me as a Trotskyite girl, the reverse, of course, of a Stalinist agent, but in hallucination extremes meet. Had he faced up the next day to what he had done, we might have been friends again, and the charge would have been reason for laughter: "I thought Mary's brothers were GPU agents." But perhaps he did not know me well enough to expose himself by an admission of error. In later years sometimes he would feel sorry and apologize.

During that bad night I assessed my situation. I was alone, with no one to turn to. Philip and my job were gone. Grandpa was dead; my only friends were people like Eunice Clark who were not real friends. Martha McGahan, whom I loved, had moved to California. My marriage was a mistake. I clearly saw that I never should have married this peculiar man, yet I did not have the courage to take my suitcase and go off somewhere by myself. That would have been Miss Sandison's counsel. And where was she, dear Miss Sandison, when I needed her? Probably in the British Museum working on Arthur Gorges.

Yet in reality nothing is as bad as it seems (or as in

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logic, it ought to be). That badly injured marriage lasted seven more years, though it is true that it never recovered.

*

In her typically thorough fashion Mary McCarthy provided readers of her memoir How I Grew *with a biographical glossary of "Lesser-Known Figures" mentioned in the text. The following glossary is in keeping with her style.*

Axel's Castle (1931) is one of Wilson's most important books of literary criticism. His first novel, ***I Thought of Daisy,*** was published in 1927. ***Memoirs of Hecate County,*** published in 1942, was his second novel.

Bowden Broadwater and McCarthy were married in December 1946, after she divorced Wilson. Their marriage lasted fifteen years. Broadwater is a writer, editor and teacher.

Eunice Clark was a classmate of McCarthy's at Vassar.

Covici-Friede Inc. was a publishing firm where McCarthy held her first full-time job. Most Covici-Friede employees were Communists or fellow-travelers. As an editorial assistant (earning twenty-five dollars a week), McCarthy read manuscripts and learned publishing skills such as copyediting and proofreading.

Lake Crescent is in the Olympic Mountains in Washington State. When McCarthy lived in Seattle with her maternal grandparents, her grandfather took her to a resort on the lake every summer.

Fred (F.W.) Dupee, an editor of the newly revised *Partisan Review*, had formerly been the literary editor of the *New Masses* and a writer for *The Nation*. Dupee later ran the English department at Bard College and was

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responsible for hiring McCarthy to teach there after she separated from Wilson in 1945.

The **GPU** was the Soviet secret police at that time (a prototype for the KGB).

Sidney Hook was a philosopher, political theorist, writer and educator.

Harold Johnsrud, an actor, playwright and director, was the first of McCarthy's four husbands. McCarthy married Johnsrud at the age of twenty-one, one week after she graduated from Vassar. Their marriage lasted three years.

Sergey Mironovich Kirov, a Russian revolutionary, was assassinated in 1934.

Dwight Macdonald was an editor at *Fortune* magazine and a writer for *The Nation* before he joined the editorial board of *Partisan Review*. He created and edited the magazine *politics* and was a longtime friend of McCarthy's.

Martha McGahan was a classmate of McCarthy's at Vassar.

Margaret Marshall, then assistant literary editor of *The Nation*, and McCarthy had co-authored a five-article series for *The Nation* entitled "Our Critics, Right or Wrong." The series, which attacked critics and book reviewers, created a stir in the publishing world and helped launch McCarthy's literary career.

Major Mathews owned the stables where McCarthy took riding lessons while she attended the Annie Wright Seminary in Tacoma, Washington: "We went on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings to the stable of Major Mathews . . . an English officer who had settled with his short-haired wife in our Northwest. They gave us tea and let us smoke when no chaperon accompanied us. . . . My

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hours of purest, most intense happiness at the Seminary were concentrated in Saturday morning spring rides through the woods . . . " (Mary McCarthy, *How I Grew*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986.

George L.K. Morris was the primary backer of *Partisan Review*, contributing about $3,000 annually in operating costs. An abstract painter from an old New York family, Morris was considered a political innocent by his *PR* colleagues. The Workers Bookstore, mentioned above, was Stalinist, and Morris walked in and asked for Trotsky's anti-Stalinist book.

Partisan Review was founded in 1934 by Philip Rahv and William Phillips as a pro-Communist publication of the New York John Reed Club. In 1936 the journal discontinued publication when it severed ties with the Communist party. It was revived a year later by Rahv, Phillips, Mary McCarthy, Dwight Macdonald, Fred Dupee and George L.K. Morris. In its new form, the journal declared itself independent of all party associations and programs, yet most of its editors were anti-Stalinist pro-Trotskyites still committed to Marxism. McCarthy worked weekends at *Partisan Review*, writing their theater column.

William Phillips, a former writer and speaker for the John Reed Clubs—organizations for pro-Communist writers and artists—was, along with Philip Rahv, one of the founders of the original *Partisan Review*.

Philip Rahv, a Russian-born intellectual and political theorist, was one of the founding editors of *Partisan Review*. During the spring of 1937 McCarthy began dating Rahv; they lived together until just prior to McCarthy's marriage to Wilson.

Helen Estabrook Sandison was chairman of the English department at Vassar while McCarthy was a student. Sandison was an Elizabethan scholar and one of McCarthy's

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favorite professors. Her lifetime work was an edition of the works of Sir Arthur Gorges, a translator of the first-century Roman writer Lucan.

Benjamin Stolberg was a freelance journalist McCarthy had typed for during her first years in New York City when she was married to Harold Johnsrud and writing book reviews for *The Nation*.

Nathalie Swan's mother was cofounder of the Junior League. Nathalie Swan was a classmate of McCarthy's from Vassar who became an architect and later married Philip Rahv.

—A.C.

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Two Poems by Daryl Hine

Oenone to Paris

This and the following letter provide feminine footnotes to the Iliad and Odyssey, which furnished much material to Greek and Latin poets, evidence of the greater durability and appeal of myth transformed into literature. The nymph Oenone, first love of Paris, son of Priam king of Troy and erstwhile foundling and shepherd, reproaches him with deserting her as a consequence of a beauty competition among three goddesses, Juno, Minerva (Pallas) and Venus. As a reward for awarding the golden apple to Venus, Paris was encouraged to seek the love of the most beautiful woman in the world (according to her who should know): Helen, already married to Menelaus, king of Sparta. He does so, with notorious, incalculable consequences. The lives of nymphs, though naturally long, were neither endless nor usually eventful. Summoned, toward the end of the Trojan War, to treat the fatally wounded instigator of it all with the medical skills inculcated in her by Apollo, Oenone will refuse until too late, and in remorse will immolate herself on Paris' funeral pyre.

The nymph whom Paris swears he never knew
From lofty Ida sends these scribbled few
Words to him to whom she still is true.
Will your new bride let you read this? Do so,
It's not in Mycenaean Greek, you know.
A water-nymph, Oenone, I lament
The wrong you did me, dear—with your consent?
What god has cursed me? What injustice will
Prevent my staying your beloved still?
Merited punishment is bearable;
What one has not deserved is terrible.

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You weren't so grand when I, the daughter of
A mighty river, granted you my love.
Though Priam's son, you were (to tell the truth)
A slave. A nymph, I wed that servile youth.
Amongst your flocks we often rolled at ease
On beds of leafy grass beneath the trees,
And sometimes while we lay on straw and hay
A lowly cabin kept the frost away.
Who pointed out the woods that suit the chase
Best, and the bear-cubs' rocky hiding place?
At times I helped you spread your snares around,
Or hunted with swift hounds on broken ground.
My name can still be read in beech trees' bark,
Oenone, where your dagger left its mark,
And as those tree-trunks grow so does my name—
Grow tall and straight to advertise my claim!
There is a willow at the riverside
On which our names are carven side by side:
Long may it live, that weeping willow tree
Whose wrinkled bark displays this poetry:
"Can Paris leave Oenone? Sooner will
Xanthus reverse its course and flow up hill."
Turn backward, Xanthus! Waters, seek your source!
Paris deserted me without remorse.

My fate was sealed on that occasion—whence
Began this winter of indifference—
When naked, Venus, June, Pallas too,
Indecent stripped of armour, came to you
For judgement. Coldly, with astonishment,
I shuddered as you told of the event.
I asked our elders, so great was my fright,
And they agreed your conduct was not right.
Its timbers felled and trimmed, your well-caulked boat
Upon the sky-blue waves was soon afloat.
You wept at parting—that you can't deny.
Your new love is more scandalous than I.
You wept, and seeing that my eyes were wet,

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We mingled tears in mutual regret.
No elm was ever trammeled by a vine
As your arms twined about this neck of mine.
And, ah—how many times your shipmates laughed
When you complained the wind detained your craft,
Knowing all along the wind was aft.
How many times you kissed me, who can tell?
Your tongue could hardly frame the word,
"Farewell!"
Light breezes swell the shrouds that used to droop
Aloft, white water furrows at the poop:
I watch your sail until it disappears,
Drenching the sand with my unhappy tears.
I pray the sea-green Nereids to bring
You swiftly back—though I lose everything!
In answer to my prayers you have returned
With someone else. Thus is devotion spurned.

A breakwater of stone, that was a steep
Mountain, confronts the breakers of the deep:
Descrying thence your sails, I felt an urge
To hurry to you through the salt sea surge.
Glimpsing some scarlet on the foredeck while
I dithered, I flinched, for that was not your style.
Sped by the breeze, the ship drew near and docked.
Seeing a woman with you, I was shocked
What's more—and how could I contain my pique?—
To see her clinging to you, cheek to cheek.
Indeed I beat my breast and tore my dress
And scratched my tear-drenched face in my distress,
Till holy Ida rang with my lament;
And there, to my dear rocks, in tears, I went.
May Helen mourn for your inconstancy.
One day, and feel the grief she brought on me!

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Ladies who leave their husbands overseas
To follow you—now you take joy in these,
But when you led a needy shepherd's life,
Then I alone was that poor shepherd's wife.
Your wealth and palaces don't mean a thing
To me, nor my alliance to a king,
Though Priam should be willing to permit
Our marriage, and his queen acknowledge it.
I'm sure I'm worthy of a potentate,
My hands are made to hold the reins of state.
And just because I used to lie beside
You underneath a tree, do not deride
My qualifications as a royal bride.
There's safety in my love, moreover: for
My sake no ships are launched, no threats of war.
Is this the prize that pride and lust have brought,
A fugitive by warring armies sought?
Should she be given back? Go ask your brothers,
Hector, Deiphobus and the others,
Ask Antenor and Priam, too—their age
Is great enough by now to make them sage.
A bad beginning, to prefer your lust
To your country! Such misconduct must
Make you ashamed. Her husband's cause is just.
You won't, if you are prudent, trust the charms
Of one like her who fell into your arms.
As Menelaus mourns the outrage of
His bed dishonoured by a stranger's love,
So you will too. No cunning can recall
Fidelity when lost for one and all.
She burns with love for you? So loved she once
Her husband, who now sleeps alone, poor dunce.
The luck of Hector and Andromache
We might have had if you had married me.
But you are flighty as the leaves that fly
Before the fickle breezes, brittle, dry
And no more weighty than a head of wheat
When desiccated by the summer's heat.

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Your sister thus—Cassandra—prophesied,
As I recall, her tousled locks untied:
"Oenone, why attempt to sow the sand?
Fruitlessly your oxen plough the strand.
A Grecian cow is coming, to undo
(Heaven forfend!) your country, home and you.
Sink her filthy vessel if you can.
The blood with which it's fraught is Phrygian."
Her women seized her in her vatic fit;
My blond hair stood on end in awe of it.
Ah, prophetess, you proved too true, too plain:
This Grecian cow has ravaged my domain.
Though fair of face, this false adulteress
Betrayed her marriage for a guest's caress.
Some Theseus—unless I've got the name
Wrong—abducted her before you came
Along. You think that lusty youth returned
Her good as new? You wonder where I learned
This cynicism love so richly earned?
You talk of force and call her innocent?
Someone so often ravished must consent.

Yet I to my unfaithful mate am true,
Though by your rules I might be false to you.
Swift-footed satyrs rushed, a wanton rout,
Through thickets where I hid, to find me out;
From Faunus, pine-boughs round his horny head,
Through soaring Ida's foothills, too, I fled.
The god that founded Troy made love to me;
Apollo took my prized virginity,
But not without a fight: I pulled his hair
And scratched him on the cheeks and everywhere.
I did not ask my price in gems and gold,
For which free bodies wickedly are sold.
Seeing my worth, he taught me medicine
Himself, the skills my hands are gifted in.
Of all medicinal herbs and roots I know
The use, wherever in the world they grow.

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If only love were curable by such
Simples! My knowledge does not help me much.
Even my benefactor used to herd
Cattle, and fell in love himself, I've heard.

Relief, which earth with all her produce can't
Afford—or great Apollo—you can grant.
You can, and I deserve your kindness, for
At least I did not cause the Trojan War.
Still, once your childhood playmate, I belong
To you, and shall, I pray, my whole life long.

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Medea to Jason

There is nothing marginal about Medea, whose name signifies intelligence and cunning. Enchanting daughter of Aeetes, king of Colchis at the Eastern end of the Black Sea, she was also niece of Circe, whose magic Odysseus narrowly escapes, and, like Ariadne and Phaedra below, granddaughter of the sun. As well versed in the black arts, including pharmacology, as she is well connected, Medea aids Jason in stealing the golden fleece, by means of a series of tests, detailed here, which highlight the fairytale quality of this saga, and then accompanies him to Greece where she tricks the daughters of King Pelias, who had set the whole quest afoot, into attempting to rejuvenate him by cutting him up and boiling him in a magic cauldron. Medea, however, withholds the secret ingredient, with predictable fatal results. When Jason imprudently deserts her for Creusa, Medea takes the terrible revenge threatened at the end of this letter, incinerating her rival, immolating her children by Jason, and flying off to Athens in a dragon-chariot. Ovid wrote a tragedy on this subject, which unlike its heroine has not survived.

While Queen of Colchis, I believe, I made
Available to you my magic aid.
That was the period at which the dread
Sisters should have cut my mortal thread
Short, for then I could have died content:
Existence since seems one long punishment.

Cursed be the day the gilded youth of Greece
Aboard the Argo sought the golden fleece!
When we in Colchis saw this foreign ship
Crowded with heroes in our Phasis dip
Oar! just why your beauty charmed me so,
Fair hair and fair, false tongue, I do not know.

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O why, when that strange ship had come to land
And had discharged its brash, adventurous band,
Didn't heartless Jason meet his death
Unarmed against the bronze bulls' fiery breath?
Or plant a fatal foe with every seed
And therefore reap what he had sown indeed?
What bad faith would have perished, rogue, with you!
How many woes would have been spared me, too!

There is a certain pleasure, is there not?
In bringing up old benefits forgot,
And I intend to savour what may be
The only pleasure you can give to me.
Untried, obedient to some command,
You trespassed in my happy fatherland.
Medea in that country occupied
The same position as your newest bride
In this; in father's wealth I too took pride:
Hers rules the shores of Corinth; my papa
Reigns from the Hellespont to Scythia.
Aeetes welcomed you; your shipmates made
Themselves at home upon our rich brocade.
I saw you; even though you were unknown
To me, my peace of mind was overthrown.
I looked and was lost, I burned with strange, divine
Fire, like a pine-torch blazing in a shrine.
Irresistible as destiny
And handsome, with a look you ravished me.
I think you guessed, you wretch! for there's no way
Of hiding love; it gives itself away.

Then you were told our laws: that you somehow
Must break two untamed oxen to the plough.
(The bulls belonged to Mars, their igneous
Breath as well as horns were dangerous.
Their feet were solid brass, each brazen snout
Was blackened by the flames that they breathed out.)
You were commanded furthermore to sow

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The fields with seeds from which a host would grow
To attack you, earthborn men at arms,
A disconcerting crop for one who farms!
Your final task: by any means you can
To dupe the fleece's sleepless guardian.
So said the king. You Argonauts in woe
From your purple couches rose to go.
How far away Creusa seemed to you
Then, her father and her dowry too!
Sadly you left. A tear bedimmed my eye,
Seeing you depart; I sighed, "Good-bye!"

Smitten, I sought my bed, then—not to sleep
But all night long to lie awake and weep.
The bulls—the watchful snake—the dreadful crop
Plagued my imagination without stop,
Whence fear, then love—but love was fed by fear.
Next morning, entering my room, my dear
Sister perceived my pitiable case
From my disheveled hair and tear-stained face.
She begged me anyway I could to save
The Argonauts . . . the aid she asked I gave.

Pines and oaks obscure a certain glade
So sunbeams rarely penetrate its shade:
There is—or was—a temple in that wood
Where chaste Diana's golden statue stood—
Have you forgotten that as well as me?
For there you first committed perjury!
"Yours to decree what destiny demands—
Henceforth my life and death are in your hands.
Great as appears your power to hurt at will,
My salvation would be greater still.
My griefs which you can palliate implore
You, and your clan's farsighted ancestor,
The rites of triple faced Diana, and
Whatever gods are honoured in this land.
O Maiden, pity me and mine, and make

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Me yours eternally, for pity's sake.
But if you will not deign to wed a Greek—
Dare I such heavenly condescension seek?—
May my spirit melt into thin air
Before another bride than you shall share
My bed! Witness Juno who presides
Over the vows of bridegrooms and of brides,
Also the goddess in whose marble fane
We're standing, that I do not swear in vain!"
The speech of which these words are but a part,
Your handclasp, touched a simple maiden's heart.
I even saw you weep—is there a way
Of feigning tears? The things you had to say
Thus quickly stole my maidenhead away.

You brought the brazen bulls beneath the yoke
Unscathed, and then the hard-packed ploughland
broke,
Using that plough of which my father spoke.
With deadly dragons' teeth you sowed the earth,
And soldiers sprang up, fully armed from birth,
And even I, who'd lent my magic aid,
Paled to see so suddenly arrayed
That miraculously earth-born band
In fratricidal combat hand-to-hand.
Behold the sleepless, giant loathly worm
Hiss and on his scaly belly squirm!
Where was the dowry of your royal bride,
The Isthmus with the sea on either side,
When I, outlandish as I seem to you
Nowadays, and poor, and baleful too,
Cast on those blazing eyes a drowsy spell
And helped you safely snatch the fleece as well?

My father I betrayed, his realm forsook—
Exile as my just deserts I took;
I left my sister and my mother, gave
Myself, a virgin, to an errant knave.

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I sacrificed my brother to our flight
Ruthlessly, but more I cannot write,
The deed I dared to do defies my pen:
I too should have been torn in pieces then!
Nor did I fear the sea—why, after all,
Should I, a woman and a criminal?

Where's the heavenly retribution we
So thoroughly deserved to meet at sea?
You for deceit, I for credulity?
Why didn't the Symplegades collide
To mash our bones together side by side?
Why did rapacious Scylla, who must loathe
All ingrates, not make mincemeat of us both?
Or Charybdis' whirlpool drag us down
Under the Sicilian sea to drown?

In triumph, safe returned against all odds,
You laid the golden fleece before your gods.
Why mention Pelias' pious daughters, who
Were hoodwinked by my demonstration to
Chop their father up to make a stew?
To you I'll praise myself, since others blame
The crimes that I committed in your name.
But then you dared—words fail me, yes, I grieve
To say, you dared to order me to leave!
I left, and took our children with me, and
That love that drives me over sea and land.

Too soon I seemed to hear the marriage choir
As torches blazed with hymeneal fire
And flutes poured forth your wedding melody,
Alas! more doleful than a dirge to me!
I had not known there was such wickedness,
But I turned cold with horror nonetheless,
And still the crowd's enthusiastic cheers,
Drawing ever nearer, hurt my ears.
Covertly my slaves were all in tears

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On every side, for nobody could choose
To be the messenger of such bad news.
Whatever it was, I did not want to know;
My heart was sore with knowing even so.
My younger son, agog to see the show,
Called me to the window, "Mummy, see
Daddy's leading the parade—there he
Goes in all his golden finery!"
At that I beat my breast and tore my dress
And even scratched my face in my distress.
My fury prompted me to rush outside
And snatch the wedding garland off your bride;
Beside myself, I almost could have thrown
My arms about you, claimed you as my own.

Father, rejoice! Forsaken and betrayed,
Thus I propitiate my brother's shade!
Having lost my home and native land,
I find myself at last abandoned and
Humiliated by my husband—he
Who hitherto was all in all to me.
Wild bulls and serpents I could subjugate,
One creature I could not subdue—my mate.
Although my spells protected him from fire,
I can't escape the ardours of desire;
My magic arts are gone, enchantment fails,
Not even mighty Hecate avails.
Daylight I loathe, I lie awake all night,
Uncomforted by sleep however slight,
And I, who could a dragon hypnotize,
Cannot induce myself to close my eyes
With drugs that proved so potent otherwise.
The limbs I saved another's limbs entwine:
The prize is hers, the effort all was mine.

Perhaps when boasting to your foolish wife
You will find something in my way of life
Or appearance possibly to blame?

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Well, let her laugh and vilify my name,
Let her exult in purple! Soon she will
Weep, and burn with fiercer passions still.
As long as there is poison, steel, or fire,
Medea's enemies shall feel her ire!
Listen, if prayer can touch a breast of steel,
To words that fall far short of all I feel.
Today I come as supplicant to you,
And kneel at your feet, just as you used to do
At mine in supplication—often, too!
Think of our sons, though you think ill of me,
Protect them from Creusa's savagery.
They trouble me—how like you they appear!
Each time I look at them, I shed a tear.
By the gods and my forebear, the sun,
By our babes and everything I've done
For you, give back your love, which I was mad
Enough to buy with everything I had!
Be true to your word, remembering your vow,
And if I ever helped you, help me now.
I do not seek your aid with man or bull
Or to make a snake insensible,
It's you I seek, I have deserved your love
Which you yourself made me a present of.

You ask, where is my dowry? Need you ask?
Did I not assist you in your task?
My dowry is the golden fleece, which I
Know, if I asked it back, you would deny.
My dowry is your safety and the health
Of all your crew. Has Creon's girl such wealth?
Your life, your marriage, your prosperity—
And your ingratitude!—you owe to me,
And soon enough—but why should I say more?
My anger has enormities in store,
Which I'll pursue. Perhaps I shall repent
In time the manner of your punishment,

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Yet what is worthier repentance than
Having cared for such a callous man?
Let that deity see to the rest
Who causes such a turmoil in my breast,
As I elaborate I don't know what
Awful scheme too terrible for thought!

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The Statue

Nicholas Shakespeare

The rue Lapin slinks like a pickpocket behind the back of the Théâtre Larache, joining the boulevard Denfert-Rocherau at the rue Saint-Anne. It is a narrow street, without distinction or interest apart from a medieval tower, now closed, from where the French navy claim the discovery of twenty-one planets.

Walk up the rue Lapin in summer and you might miss its other attraction: the statue of a man on horseback, cast in sea-storm bronze. The statue stands back from the road in a recess planted with four copper beeches. The head of its rider is lost in the trees. When the wind parts the leaves, he is revealed in a plumed hat. The hat is waxy with pigeon droppings, like one of the bottles used for candles in the bistro opposite.

Over eight thousand miles away, in the Bolivian mining town of Oruro and dominating a windswept square on its northern outskirts, stands an identical statue. The grayish-green rider not only looks the same, down to the bird shit on his chevrons. On closer examination, he is

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the same, cast in the Fabrique de Fer, no. 4 avenue Béco, in the same year, from the same mold.

The plaque on the Norwegian granite base in Paris reads:

Le Maréchal Ney 1769–1815.

It was erected to commemorate the hero of Borodino and Smolensk, who once threatened to bring Napoleon back to Paris in a cage.

The plaque on the statue in Oruro describes a man who died fifty-six years later, shot through the jaw while pounding his mistress's door in Lima. His plaque reads:

General Mariano Melgarejo
President of Bolivia, 1864–1871

Beneath, in smaller letters, runs the inscription:

Riding out on his great march astride Holofernes

A March evening in Paris, 1910. A full house at the Gaîté-Lyrique. The audience stares. Lights explode across their faces. Red and blue gunfire igniting the dark horizons of bank clerks, apothecaries, charlatans, kings.

They watch Aladdin rub his lamp. With a Moorish leer, he wishes for all the charms of Paris. His words challenge the stage.

"All the charms of Paris . . ." The words echo in the underground cavern, empty but for a basket of flowers.

More lights explode. The petals stir, their movement

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mimicked in the audience by young King Manoel of Portugal who cannot see flowers without smelling the japonica which his mother had poked into the face of her assassin, but who forgets everything as he sees a blond head rising from the artificial petals. For this woman, he thinks, gazing down on her breasts, each covered as if to restrain its prominence with a glittering starfish, he could imagine losing his throne. (Later, he does.)

She steps from her basket and trips. The audience inhales, in finer concert than a chorus line. She steadies herself. Her mouth swells into a smile. She turns to those in the dark at her feet, each imagining she looks at him. The orchestra strikes up.

"When I take my *bain de mer,*" sings Gaby Deslys, "at what do all the men stare?"

One of the staring men is a young Bolivian called Lizardo Real. He sits in the third row, tapping his foot against the seat in front, a habit which has caused its occupant to rotate twice. On each occasion, Lizardo has forced his eyes offstage to the woman next to him, whom later he will walk to the Restaurant Paillard (for the *choucroute Impériale* which has become his favorite dish), and afterwards, to her room in quai de Béthun, fourth floor, front, where he will watch the large knot in which she has piled her peroxided hair untie itself with a magnificent shiver as he struggles to unbutton his boots.

The woman who steps from the bombazine dress—his gift—is Marie. Her abnormally long eyelashes remind him of a girl from Oruro called Ana.

That night, holding her from behind, his moustache against her shoulder, his face in the cobwebbed tunnel of her hair, Lizardo hears the rise and fall of Marie in her sleep. She is far away, in Besançon again, a talkative little girl (who wishes she was as tall and pretty as her sister), helping her father, the glazier, to prise ducks from the frozen river. Lizardo feels someone else in his arms, awake. He feels Ana. He imagines the look in her eyes. He closes his eyes to avoid it. He cannot. She twists away

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from him, out of his arms. Her face is raised above him. He dare not open his eyes. He feels her gaze pressing down, down, more unsparing than the Altiplano sun.

It is an April afternoon two years before. Lizardo Real follows his shadow, two steps at a time, into Oruro's town hall, a nondescript building on the Calle Pizarro. He wears his only suit. He walks quickly. He is expected at a meeting of the municipal council, of which he is treasurer, by the town's Mayor, Guillermo Valencia.

Valencia has convened the meeting to discuss the erection of a public monument in the square opposite the railway station. He rakes his long beard with a hand, waiting for his council to join him. He rehearses his argument.

For over three centuries metal had been gouged from Oruro's hills, first silver, now tin. Its children breathed darkness from the moment they could walk. Every day its women leaned in the doorways having touched the shoulders of their men one last time in case they didn't return, watching them disappear into the river of heads, cheeks pouched with pads of coca, teeth green, hearts black as the shafts under the mountain known as Negro Pabellon.

That mountain had produced as much wealth as the Imperial City of Potosi, sufficient—according to the computations of the Fricke Company accountant—to build a silver bridge three carriages wide from South America to Europe. And what was there to show for all this? Nothing, except for two trees in the plaza, a peach and a twisted willow, which were covered every night with hessian sheets because of the wind, and a handful of foreigners from the mining company who fainted in the altitude if they tangoed so much as the length of the Hotel Terminus.

Otherwise the town was one gray house after another, one street no different from the next, one street corner

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the same as every other corner, so relentlessly the same that it was common even for people who hadn't tasted a drop of Oruro's villainous maize beer to mistake their own doorsteps.

In another year, the men who nodded greeting in the town hall might have argued against Valencia's proposal. But in that year the railway between Oruro and Viacha had been completed.

The town was already connected by a narrow gauge track to Antofagasta, 600 miles to the south. The new line opened Oruro to traffic from the capital, La Paz. Even the council's nervous vice president, Juan Alonso, whose thin, pale face could have spent its thirty-four years in bandages, agreed that on leaving the terminus building, visitors from the capital should be greeted by something other than a gray monotony enlivened by two twisted trees.

"Gentlemen," growled Valencia, when all were mustered. He looked purposefully at them. "We have one item on the agenda. The monument in Plaza _____."

Guillermo Valencia was fifty-five. He was small and squarely built, without a care for how he dressed, which might have been been in a thunderstorm, his black corduroy suit flapped open by the same unseen gust that parted the ends of his long gray beard into two ruffled scarves that could be thrown back over each shoulder, tempting the woman he loved, Chacita, the giggler, to tie their ends on certain occasions with scarlet bows.

In fifty-five years, Valencia had never been taken seriously by women. He was as helpless in their grasp as he would have liked men to be in his own. The truth was, men also found him a little absurd. Even if they didn't know about the bows, they could have imagined them. But unlike the women of Oruro, they didn't dare laugh out loud. Irascible, single-minded, unforgiving, Valencia was a bad man to have as an enemy, which was why no one around that table listening to him could doubt the outcome. Valencia was able to make each of their lives

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extremely tiresome. His mind was set on this scheme. What did it matter anyway?

After a twenty-minute soliloquy, he formally proposed the erection of his monument. The vote was passed unanimously. Valencia put a second proposal to the vote: the subject of the monument. He argued there was only one candidate—the man whose exertions had placed Oruro on a map that linked the town not just with La Paz, but with the most advanced nation in the world—and in so doing bound Oruro, briefly if splendidly, with the fate of France.

"You all know who I'm talking about." He surveyed the eleven faces round the table. They nodded gravely. They knew who he was talking about. They knew their Mayor's inexplicable belief that he was in some curious way—which explained the length he grew his beard, the sudden flames of anger, the opaque gentlenesses—a blood relation to this man, a man whose "exertions" they saw in a completely different light—the beam of dismal defeat. But what did they care? Napoleon, Bolivar, Melgarejo, Christ on his bicycle, it was only a statue. Valencia could let this meeting last all day if he chose, and they all had reasons for getting away. To see whether Lizardo's aunt, Hortensia, could produce something from her shawl to chase the pain from an abscessed gum. To win another trick off her husband in a room behind the billiard parlor. To sleep.

Valencia's eyes rested on the face of his protégé, Lizardo Real, dreaming of the stationmaster's daughter and the blue and white dress he was intending to buy her from the Fricke Company shop.

"I'm talking about General Melgarejo."

Lizardo, as the council's treasurer, but also as Valencia's favorite, was deputed to make inquiries. His inquiries revealed no foundry in Bolivia could make the cast.

"It seems every statue in La Paz, Cochabamba and Sucre comes from Paris."

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Valencia approved. He knew the love, amounting almost to an obsession, which General Melgarejo had held for France. In Lizardo's reply, he traced the same hand of fate which made him share the name—perhaps a good deal more—of the man supposed to be Melgarejo's father.

Lizardo found the address of a statuary in Paris. He drafted a letter from Valencia, requesting an estimate for an equestrian statue in the best available bronze.

In three months a reply came from the *directeur général* of the Fabrique de Fer. In his letter, Monsieur Clémenceau enumerated the advantages of phosphor bronze—used to great effect on the Orléans railway. For its strength, for its resistance to the abrasion caused by "your Altiplano winds, your dramatic variations in temperature," for its close-grained patina, phosphor bronze could not be excelled.

There was one drawback: the cost. But Clémenceau warned that the modern usage for reducing costs was likely to increase them. "A bad phosphor bronze is no better than a bad gun metal." He estimated the cost of casting General Melgarejo on his mount Holofernes at 165,000 francs.

The Mayor of Oruro registered surprise at the estimate, nevertheless agreed to the terms. Clémenceau was informed that his trusted young treasurer, Lizardo Real, would be leaving imminently for Paris, armed with the necessary bonds and an aquatint portrait of Mariano Melgarejo on Holofernes.

Lizardo's departure for Paris was an emotional one. His mother wept for the first time since the Liberal Revolution of 1899 and gave him three bush chickens, as well as two blankets, one thick, one thin, to wrap over his knees on board the *Thuringia.*

His proud father kissed him on both cheeks and

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wished him well. "Do nothing I would not do," he said, the limp in his smile acknowledging the extent to which he had ever done anything.

His aunt, the sapient *chola* from Challapata, said she'd probably be dead when he returned, buried beneath the weight on her back. (What she kept in that shawl was a secret not even her husband knew, but she had produced from it on occasions an ostrich egg, a Chimu christening pot, a small pig—even, to his delight, five bottles of Allsopp's India Ale.) But she'd pray for Lizardo. "Far from your hometown, far from health . . ."

Only Ana had stayed at home, unable to watch him leave.

One by one Lizardo was embraced by the members of the council. No one knew quite what to say except a jealous Good Luck. Few of them had left Oruro—and then only to Uyuni—but they had the word of Don Maximiliano who sold bibles for the Gospel Society that Paris was a den of the vilest iniquity.

"Don't disgrace us," said the Mayor, grasping Lizardo's shoulders and pretending to survey his brown eyes, but instead thinking how much he, Guillermo Valencia, would like to be stepping onto that horse.

"We'll expect you by the next *diablada.*"

The *diablada.* That was why Lizardo was leaving now on horseback, his face in the flopping shadow of a large straw hat (a present from Ana). That was the reason he would spend this night on a mud bench in a *posta* instead of reclined in a comfortable seat on the Antofagasta train.

The carnival of the devil dancers had ended at midnight. Long before Valencia's decision to send him to France, Lizardo had been chosen to play China Supay, the devil's wife. Her role was to seduce the Archangel Michael.

Lizardo had trained rigorously for the part. Even

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Orureños needed stamina to leap for a week at that altitude, springing this way and that to the din of drums, the voices of hell.

For three months he prepared his costume: the wig with braids of tufted oxtail, the breastplate embroidered with silver finer than a Paracas weave, the plaster-of-paris mask fanged with mirror splinter teeth, the horns representing the temptations of the flesh, which he had lowered lasciviously at Juan Alonso, encased in the features of the Archangel—and at the very moment of lowering them sneezed so loudly at the dust coming through his mask that he caused the council's nervous vice president to jump a foot in the air (just as, aged ten, the short-sighted Alonso had leapt in the stomach of Negro Pabellon on coming face to face with a blind pit mule: he had mistaken its ears for the devil's horns . . .).

None of this would Lizardo have missed, but in not missing it, he missed the train which had passed through Oruro the previous morning. Fortunately, the train stopped a whole day at Uyuni, 150 miles away, where he would join it for the journey over the nitrate fields to the coast.

The morning was crisp. Earlier it had been so cold that Lizardo was forced to beat his arms about his chest, frightening a bird which he mistook for a pink flamingo. Now the sun was melting the coolness in the air. As he rode onto the stony moorland, a cloudless sky above his head, the white peaks of the Challapata mountains before him, the long *ichu* grass, coarse with frost, brushing his horse's flanks, the only sound the squeak of the saddle, it came to Lizardo that he had rarely been so happy.

Lizardo Real was twenty-eight, the son of a shy wheelwright who worked for the mining company. The source of his family's pride was his degree in law (third class) from the University of Cochabamba. It was a rare

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qualification for an Orureño. At an early age he had been elected to *corregidor.*

Others might have felt his salary too small to ensure honesty in government. Not Lizardo. He took pride in the machinations of local government, in balancing the books, in administering funds for public works, as others might take pride in laying a mosaic pattern. His pride was not so much moral as mathematical. Mistaking it, Guillermo Valencia elevated him to treasurer.

What no one suspected, only his aunt who saw it in her bezoar stone but who knew no spell on earth existed to cure it, was the extent to which Lizardo was a dreamer. He only had to see a peat mound to believe it concealed a network of silver veins to outstrip Potosi; a vulture to think it was something infinitely more beautiful. That was the trouble with Lizardo: all his buzzards were condors. But no one knew. They delighted in the qualities which made him at the age of twenty-eight such a prepossessing figure in Oruro, with a degree from the same university that had given Bolivia three presidents, two generals and a poet whose work was read aloud in the squares of Salamanca.

From the moment he was asked to play in the *diablada* to the moment when Valencia entrusted him with the mission of the statue, Lizardo had dreamed of nothing other than China Supay and Mariano Melgarejo—to the exclusion even of Ana whom he found one night after drafting a final letter to Monsieur Clémenceau, with her hands in her eyes, in such despair that his arm around her neck would not console her, nor a kiss on her flinching cheeks, only the assurance that when he came back from Paris he would bring an amethyst embedded in a wedding ring of pure gold . . .

But he had not thought of Ana. He had thought only of China Supay, the devil's wife, and Mariano Melgarejo. And now the masked dance was over, now that he had dazzled the whole town with his splendid head and his

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somersaults, now that he had spent four days, from Wednesday to Saturday, with his hands on his hips, his shoulders wriggling to the same tune, played over and over again by a band as repetitive as the streets through which he danced, now that the *diablada* was finished for another year, Lizardo was still not free to think of the stationmaster's daughter.

His mind was devoted instead to the man whose image he carried carefully folded in his saddlepack, who had himself ridden out on this same road forty years before to the same squeak of leather: General Mariano Melgarejo.

Lizardo loosened his reins. He rummaged for the aquatint, tucked behind the three bush chickens, next to the envelope containing bonds worth 165,000 francs. He removed it from its cardboard folder and laid it flat across his horse's withers. The portrait showed a small-headed man with deep eyes blacker than ore dust and a beard as thick as a mesh.

Lizardo looked into the face, rising up and down with the horse's walk, like a piece of bread on the sea. And in this position, he dreamed of Mariano Melgarejo, the Hero of December whose statue he was fetching from France.

Melgarejo's favorite town was Cochabamba, though he had sacked it. At university there, Lizardo heard stories about him every day, in the library, in bars, on the benches of the Plaza Colon. So often repeated, they became proverbially true. A hurricane of calamities, was the common reaction to his name; or else, it wasn't his army that was invincible: it was his ignorance.

But there were those who saw a different side to Melgarejo—the side that made him take the hand of a little lost girl, encountered in the street after an orgy, and lead her back to her parent's hovel; the side that made him shoot dead his favorite carriage horses as they careered

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whoa there! down a narrow ravine towards a mother and child, unstoppable except by bullet.

In Melgarejo's rise and fall, these others saw dramatized the possibilities which are given to men who believe they can stun the world. Guillermo Valencia was such an apologist. So was Lizardo.

To Lizardo, born as Melgarejo was on Easter Sunday, he was an inspiration for men to live out their dreams, and all men dream.

He was born in a town that sounded like a bugle call, Tarata, a hundred miles from Oruro, where the grass was so long you could lose your horse in it. He was born on Easter Sunday, 1820. "God decided," he said, "that I should be born in the same hour as his resurrection." He was born a bastard, the son of a white man he never knew—Justo Valencia—and a mestiza whose name he took. A love child, he was also a child of passion, of drink, of women, of the army, of anything aromatic with the gunpowder of adventure. He could ride at a gallop through the coca fields before he could walk. When he could walk he could do so with a horse across his shoulders. He supported General Ballivian, then turned against him and was twice condemned to death before the coup of December 1864 which brought him into La Paz on the day of the Innocents.

In the course of forty-two insurrections against him he entered La Paz often, once astride a spur-scratched cannon as if his feet were in the stirrups of Holofernes.

Astride Holofernes, he compared himself with Washington, Bolivar and Napoleon as a man sent by providence. "Don't forget to send my warmest greetings to the Emperor," he commanded his minister in Paris.

He was compared by others with Rosas of Argentina, Francisco Selano Lopez of Paraguay, Monagas of Venezuela, Santa Ana of Mexico and Nero of Rome.

He was proud, quarrelsome, puerile, vain, suspicious,

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vulgar and brutal, but he could caress with his warm voice, Oh yes, there was no doubt of that, you only had to see it in the face of his mistress, Juana Sanchez, when he stripped her naked before his ministers and generals, ordering them to kneel in homage while he stood, a glass of blazing rum in his hands looking at her through its flames and watching her smile at him, only for him, while he whispered over their backs, "I love you, Juanita."

He trusted no one and nothing—not even his shirt which he shot every night in case its folds hid something from him. But he trusted Juana Sanchez. He loved her more than he loved Holofernes, and no one lived to deny he loved Holofernes, that gigantic black horse, its black and white tail like a waterfall at night, a horse more intelligent than his generals. "It's that horse who wins my battles," he would say. "I've a small head. Look! He has a big head. He thinks for both of us."

But Holofernes was not only more intelligent and much braver than his generals. He drank more. As Melgarejo proved when he laid a place for him at a banquet and commanded a bucket of *chicha* be carried to table. Holofernes plunged his nose into the maize beer, drank, lifted his head, inspected the assembled guests, among them two Chilean diplomats, and lowered his lips as they toasted his health . . .

Lizardo rode on. The sun which before had made the horizon beautiful now made it pitiless. He folded the aquatint into his jacket pocket and removed the jacket. He took two gulps from his water bottle, raising his eyes to the plain where nothing grew except a freak amaryllis and the occasional crop of white buttercups which he cantered through, not letting his horse lower its head, in case they were the buttercups known by his aunt as "laughing celery," a flower that made you die insane with what looked like a vast smile on your lips.

He passed through a village where all the doors were

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shut. Beyond he came upon a caravan of llamas loaded with coffee and coca. Three Indians stopped and cornered them, waiting in silence for Lizardo to pass. The llamas craned their necks at him, then tore loudly at the grass. Like the cutting of a throat, thought Lizardo. That's how he would choose to die, from a knife thrust, not the barrel of a gun, not even the barrel of Melagarejo's ivory-handled pistol.

Lizardo closed his eyes.

He thought of ex-President Belzu.

The year was 1865. It was March. Four months after Melgarejo seized power, Belzu had returned from exile in Paris. He had reoccupied his palace in La Paz, his balcony. The crowd filled the Plaza Murillo to cheer him. In the distance, Melgarejo the dispossessed entered La Paz. As he approached the center, his troops seeped away. When they reached the cathedral, a handful remained. He saw the desertion in their eyes. He placed his pistol to his temple. "Either you follow, or I blow my brains out." They followed. They followed him down the Calle Junin. They followed him into the Plaza Murillo. They only stopped when he stopped. "Pretend I'm your prisoner," he ordered. "Take me into the palace."

So they led him through the crowd. They led him under Belzu, who waved his hand benignly, his wrist moist with French cologne from ten years in exile. They led him into the palace.

He strode to the first floor. He entered the large room where he used to command officers to dance together, where on his orders the Bishop of Sucre had made three circuits on his hands and knees, where he had seen Juana Sanchez naked through the blue rum flames. He saw the shape of Belzu on the balcony, over which he had marched two squadrons of his Invincible Army of December, to demonstrate their discipline. He saw Belzu turn to greet him, his face, habitually the color of ashes, now glowing with victory. He opened his arms to em-

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brace him, tickling Belzu's forgiving cheeks with his beard. Then he shot him.

He carried the body to the balcony. He laid it along the balustrade. He raised a hand for silence.

"Belzu is dead," he informed the crowd. "Who lives now?"

The crowd below, hushed for another second, pronounced.

"Viva Melgarejo!"

The sun was at its highest. It raged. In the hot air, the horizon vanished in a mirage. Volcanoes were floating islands. On their slopes the waterline of the old lake became waves. To the north a cloud of brown dust spiralled from the plain. Once Lizardo thought he saw a condor.

His horse stumbled and righted itself. Between its ears stretched a dry river bed, the contorted road to Uyuni. On this road, along the banks of this very river, General Melgarejo had set out on his greatest march of all. The march that guaranteed the unanimous vote of the Oruro council for his monument.

In the heat, Lizardo's mind slipped like the reins from his grasp. In that landscape, his imagination danced like China Supay. In the mirage, his horse became Holofernes. If he turned now, he would find an army of 4,000 at his back, following him to the ends of the earth.

They had been marching for several hours. It was long after midnight. The rain, falling thin and cold as they left Oruro, had thickened. The Andean night was freezing. No one spoke. They were numbed by what they were doing, by where they were going, by the dampness of their uniforms, by their general who rode at their head in a poncho the color of blood.

Most of them had been asleep when the order came to assemble before the garrison. A drum rattled. There was the sound of hooves in the mud. Then he appeared

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before them on Holofernes. He raised his hand, his small head, his enormous beard.

Those who knew him well said he had never been so sober.

"Soldiers of the Invincible Army of December," he began. "Soldiers of Liberty." Their allies the French were at war. Everyone knew the esteem in which he held that nation, in which he held her Emperor. Everyone knew the contempt he felt for frontiers.

"We must go to her aid."

The rain pitted the square. Dimly, they absorbed his words. Somewhere in a room in the Hotel Terminus a girl screamed. Holofernes stamped the ground, retreating. Still that voice, hard as a dagger, but soft too, like *carpincha* leather, weaved through the rain.

France was far, he heard them say. Yes, it was. "That's why we must set off immediately."

And how would they get there? He looked at them, as if to suggest they were idiots, all of them, for not having thought of it already. His lips curled the answer through a glistening beard.

"If need be, we'll swim."

So, spurring Holofernes in the rough direction of the sea, he led his men—men who had never before left the Altiplano, nor seen the waves break, nor knew a language other than Spanish, nor drunk anything else but *chicha*—towards the combined enemy armies of Prussia, Bavaria, Württemberg and Baden.

They marched into the night. They marched for an hour. They marched for two hours. They marched, chafing and squelching, for eight hours. It seemed like eighty. The monotony hypnotized them so much that they didn't even know they had left the plain. They picked their way through a narrow *quebrada.* Water followed them down the gulley, rising over their boots. They slipped. Their rifles clattered against the stones. In this way, step by precipitous step, the file of drenched men descended towards the sound of a river.

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They reached it as the sun was rising. The river tumbled between two high sandstone cliffs, carrying away the banks, the trees quivering at its edge, the road to the sea.

He looked at the dawn and the water, at the rain fading into a maize sky.

"What do we do now?" asked an aide-de-camp.

He looked over the black peaks, behind which, on the other side of an ocean, lay the country he was hoping to liberate, the embattled figure of his cousin in arms, Napoleon III . . . And in that awful moment, it came to him that so far from swimming the sea, he couldn't even reach it, that under the soaking red tent of his poncho, he was just a man with the delusions common to all men on the Altiplano.

He raised his hand to order the turnaround.

"We're going to have to do something about our roads."

Lizardo's horse had stopped. They had reached the river, a narrow street of water, twenty yards across. Lizardo stretched his legs in his stirrups and kicked. Hesitantly, his horse entered the shallows, then broke into a trot.

Refreshed by the river, it cantered up the bank opposite and shook itself. Lizardo listened to the harness jingling. He looked at the path ahead, sloping through some dwarf juniper trees.

He looked back at the river he had crossed. Replacing his hat, he inhaled deeply. Where Melgarejo had failed so grandiosely, he, Lizardo Real, treasurer to the municipal council of Oruro and inveterate dreamer, would complete the journey.

In Marie's room in the quai de Béthun, Lizardo had lain with his eyes closed, but awake, all night. Above

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him, his phantoms kept vigil. Ana's admonishing eyes had given way to Valencia's, Valencia's betrayed, uncomprehending eyes to the impassive eyes of his aunt—so close together only her nose stopped them joining—who understood him too well. He wanted to hide their gaze with an arm, but his arms were wrapped around Marie and he hadn't removed them for fear of disturbing her into one of those moments of silence which would make him think she was caught forever between breaths.

But now he felt such a constriction in his throat that he had to drink water or he would stop breathing himself. Gently, he unfolded his arms from the warm girl. She laughed, amused by something in her sleep. In the dark it was a child's laugh. It laughed away Lizardo's demons. He smiled. He poured a glass of water from the jug on the side table. The pain in his throat made it difficult to swallow. His neck ached. He rose to his feet. The joints of his knees ached also. His head rippled with dizziness.

He felt his way to the window. It was open, but he opened it wider, his hands gripping the iron balcony outside as he inhaled the first of several deep breaths that made his heart knock furiously against his chest with more determination than the fist of his uncle, the gambler, who was always convinced after an evening of cards that he was being locked out of his house, unbolted in the next street, a peat fire glowing, a kettle on the flames, and the smell of burning bird's beaks in both rooms because his wife had thrown some chicken heads onto the grate.

Lizardo lifted his eyes to the skyline. The sun was coming up, above the toll bridge on the quai de Béthun, the roofs along the rue des Ecoles and the snakeskin boulevards, their cobbles shining from the night's rain.

He turned his back on Paris. He looked into the room where Marie was sleeping; at the credenza sideboard, on which lay her black dress and petticoat, the blank wall where he could imagine a painting, the marble floor with more veins than the face of his aunt, the sorceress from Challapata who was whispered to know the language of

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animals and who spent her days making cicada oils and coral powder and buttercup broths with which she fanned the venereal fires of those, like her husband, who had been lamed by the heat, by *chicha,* by the card table, by day after day after day in the tin mines under Negro Pabellon, hoping to cut into a silver lode . . .

A bead of sweat salted his eye. Lizardo rubbed his forehead. His face was masked with sweat. Something was the matter. Never had he felt like this. He felt terrible, as if his lungs were filled with dust from a rockfall. He lay on the bed. He would have to see a doctor. Dress, when the sun was up. Go back to his hotel. Ask the manager to summon a reliable physician.

Suddenly, Lizardo felt his spirits lift. Of course. He would have to cancel the morning's meeting with Monsieur Clémenceau, a meeting he had been dreading every day for a week. And why had he been dreading it? Because if at that precise moment Guillermo Valencia had entered the room and ordered Lizardo then and there to give an account of his finances after one month in Paris, he would have to admit to his mayor that he didn't know whether he had enough to pay the Fabrique de Fer for a statue of Mariano Melgarejo, Hero of December.

One month, that's all, since Lizardo Real found the little hotel in the rue Henri-Bornier, a few streets from the Bois de Boulogne where he would spend at least two afternoons of his first week tearing bread for the tame white condors called swans, bewitched by trees which didn't need to be covered every night, the elegant neighborhoods, the department stores.

One month since the hotel receptionist had asked: "Bolivia, what country's that in, then?"

Already, on that first morning, his country felt far. In just the journey from the station, Lizardo had begun to learn the truth of Proust's remark that an hour is not an hour, it is a vase filled with scents and sounds.

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That first morning he walked to the Pré Catalan where he ordered a café creme. Sipping it, he smiled a satisfied smile that after four weeks on the *Thuringia,* he was at last drinking milk from the udders of a French cow. He raised his cup to the street through the window and gave a silent toast to Ana, to his parents, to his aunt and uncle, to the council of Oruro and its irascible mayor, without whom . . .

But he hadn't forgotten his mission. He was looking forward to a month in the French capital while the statue was cast. Perhaps six weeks. But no longer.

That afternoon, after tasting his first *choucroute Impériale,* he visited the Banque de la Nation in the rue de Maroc. There he deposited all but 50,000 francs—the sum requested by Monsieur Clémenceau as a first installment.

Next morning, having hardly slept at all, Lizardo took a cab to the avenue Béco. In his briefcase (purchased at Au Printemps department store with a month's salary), he carried Melgarejo's aquatint and an envelope containing the 50,000 francs.

An attendant led him through the foundry. A crane was unloading axle blanks. A man stood by the electric arc furnace with a wet towel in his mouth. The floor was gravelly with molder's sand. He was led upstairs.

Monsieur Clémenceau sat at a large desk behind a small lead bust of Columbine. To impress Lizardo, and to refresh himself with his language, he was reading the Spanish priest Alvaro Barba's account of treating complex ores in *El Arte de los Metales.* He skipped several pages while waiting. When Lizardo entered he closed the book. He rose on his short legs, tidily trousered in zinc-colored cloth.

"Ah . . ." he said, brightening.

Red-faced, with the puffy cheeks of a Tiepolo trumpeter, he had the old-fashioned manner of one who had been pushed into the century from behind. His office reflected his preferred taste. It was immense: a fireplace

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where a fallen beech could roast an ox, a bay window overlooking an internal courtyard known as the "graveyard" (packed with the casts which for various reasons fell short of Clémenceau's standard, the standard of a perfectionist), and three sturdy armchairs upholstered in coppery leather, all redolent of the days when the company had acted as principal statuarist to Napoleon III, before it was forced to corner the market in wide-flange beams, fence posts and ship's propellers—which was why Lizardo's arrival, bearing the commission from Oruro, excited his sympathies.

". . . the gentleman from Bolivia," he continued in passable Spanish. He showed Lizardo into a chair, informing him of his passion for Bolivian Bronze Age chisels, and his prize possession, a pair of llama-headed Topu tweezers.

"Now, your general on horseback. Show me, show me, show me."

The meeting ended an hour later with Clémenceau writing out Lizardo a receipt for the first installment—"the deposit"—and fixing a date one month ahead, by which time designs for the twenty-six foot statue would be complete.

"Then, if you're satisfied," he said, filling two thin glasses from a bottle of grenadine, "you pay the full amount—and we cast!"

One month. It was to be four weeks too many for Lizardo. Two weeks made him coltish. Four quite simply deranged him.

What broke him? Was it the first crack of the walnut which Dufay opened between her breasts at the Moulin Rouge? Was it his ride in the back of a Rocher-Schneider belonging to a rich young fauvist painter, at the wheel of which, two days later, Lizardo may well have knocked down Gide's wife in the Place de la Concorde? Was it the sight of Gaby Deslys's blond head rising through the silk

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petals, or the sound of her voice singing "La Parisienne" through the *théâtrophone* by his hotel bed?

Maybe there was never a single, identifiable moment, instead, a gradual discovery that it was no less satisfying to play the role of a rich South American in Paris—albeit one often mistaken for an Argentine—than to be a scrupulous administrator of funds on the Altiplano.

Maybe in his second week, one evening as he returned from the Restaurant Paillard or the Moulin Rouge or the Saint Louis theater, having spent more of Melgarejo's money, it finally came to him that the person he had hitherto known as Lizardo Real was in fact a compound of several people—mayors, gamblers, generals, sorceresses, stationmaster's daughters—each with desires that changed. Their modified amalgam did not necessarily enjoy the same experience tomorrow as they had enjoyed today. Or yesterday.

Or was it a lot simpler? Was it that he just discovered French women, among them the *femina destruens* who may have passed on the disease that eventually killed him.

In that month, Lizardo was to out-Melgarejo Melgarejo in his womanizing, taste more strange spirits than Melgarejo's horse. Eyes widened at the money that flowed from him. Seeing those eyes, like the billiard ball eyes of his China Supay mask, Lizardo's desire was to widen them further. His conscience wasn't ruffled by what he spent, not even on a portfolio of American railroad shares that promptly collapsed. The sums he lavished, he would recoup at the drop of one of his Borsolino hats.

Some weeks after the constriction in his throat, after three cancelled appointments with Monsieur Clémenceau, Lizardo paid another visit to the Banque de la Nation. It was a different man who walked from his hotel, not daring to spend a few coins on a cab. In walk-

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ing, he bent like a stunted tree as if his legs, which now and then knocked together, were not strong enough to support the rest of him. His once confident moustache meandered over a face pinched with pain. The pain was caused by his fever, but its expression also owed something to what he had swallowed—a solution of mercury, potassium iodide and opium.

He shuffled energetically into the bank. Someone—he didn't know if it was an attendant or a client—found him a chair. He produced his credentials and was given a metal badge with a number. A few minutes later, after experiencing initial difficulty in explaining what he wanted, he was brought the balance of the Oruro account.

Of the 115,000 francs owing to Monsieur Clémenceau, less than half remained.

Lizardo walked out into the street. He needed fresh air. He needed time to think. Once more he consulted his diary, recording the appointment postponed from the previous week.

"11.00 AM. M. Clémenceau. 115,000 fr," read the spare entry. He loosened his amethyst cravat. He could taste grenadine on his lips. 115,000 francs. His memory was as furry as his tongue. He tried to think of his uncle, the gambler at cards who had once returned with a sheep under his arm and a finger across his lips saying, "Don't ask . . ." He thought of his work as treasurer. One spectacular investment, that would save him. That was all he needed.

He was shuffling past the Salon des Indépéndants when a man thrust a leaflet into his hand.

"Read it, monsieur."

Lizardo read. The leaflet promoted the current exhibition, devoted to an important new movement, the Excessivists. Beneath the announcement was an extract from the Excessivist manifesto, printed the previous week in *Le Figaro.*

"Excess in everything is strength. The sun is never too

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strong, the sky too green, the distant sea too red, darkness too thickly black."

"Where's the exhibition?" asked Lizardo.

"In there."

The rooms were hung with canvases, crudely hammered onto large frames. They struck Lizardo as incomprehensible. The centerpiece was a painting depicting nothing on earth that Lizardo could recognize, except that the colors reminded him of his aunt's bezoar stone.

"It's a masterpiece," pronounced a man in front of him, standing back for a better view and standing on Lizardo's toes. Lizardo hopped about the floor. The man apologized, then walked off, muttering about a confrontation of obsessions.

"You know who that was?" said someone. "The great critic D——."

Lizardo stood stiller than a pink flamingo in the lake of Pampas Aullagas. He cocked his head. His mind filled with the blankness of the wall above Marie's bed. His eyes lurched over the granular surface before him.

"I'll buy it," he said.

A fortnight later, Lizardo lay in Marie's bed, holding a newspaper to the window. He was reading and rereading and reading again, as if he had missed the sense of it, an article in *Le Figaro* which unveiled the Excessivists as hoaxers, sick of fauvists, symbolists and every other ist—and his 50,000 francs masterpiece the result of tying a brush to the tail of a donkey belonging to the owner of the Lapin Agile.

He threw the paper to the floor. He hurled the curtains together above him.

A donkey!

In his fever, he cursed the vile creature. He hadn't eaten for three days because of mouth ulcers. His frail body was sustained on a diet of hyssop and porridge. His mind was driven by mirages. He saw himself tied to a

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donkey in La Paz, the same pack-animal on which Melgarejo had strapped the British consul for not paying homage to Juana Sanchez. He saw himself galloped out of La Paz backwards, towards a furious English Queen who was responding famously to Melgarejo's insult by pouring ink over a map of Bolivia. He couldn't see her, only the diminishing figure of Melgarejo, but over his shoulder he heard Queen Victoria's voice declare Bolivia no longer existed.

Thinking of Melgarejo, he coughed. "Donkeys must be in our destiny," he said aloud. Someone moved in the kitchen. "Juana?" he yelled, raising himself on an elbow. "Juanita . . . ?"

Along the quai de Béthun during the third week of November 1910, a man in a dirty brown suit known as "the Bolivian" began his market performance like this: "Which is the journey not begun in hope, which is the *chicha* not mixed with tears, which is the cloth not woven with thorns, the bird that is not a vagabond. . . . ?"

His French was halting and a woman soon bundled him away.

Early in December, two men disappeared up the same stairs of the mansion block. When they reached the landing of the fourth floor they consulted a piece of paper. They knocked at a door. A moment went by. They knocked again, louder. The door opened, wide enough for the head of the woman who looked at them. She wore a loose dress stained with milk. Her face was empty of expression. She seemed exhausted.

"Where is he?"

The question was spoken in Spanish. She shook her head. She didn't understand. Behind her a child cried.

"J'arrive, j'arrive."

"Lizardo Real."

She hesitated. She looked from one to the other, registering their determination. She opened the door. The child screamed.

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The room was as dark as a mine. It smelt stale and bitter, like flowers left too long in their water. They found Lizardo in bed, under his mother's blankets, beside a window with the curtains drawn. They drew back the curtains. In the afternoon sun, his face shone like a scrap of leather nailed to a bone except the vermilion had disappeared from the blood and the skin was black, as if he had been hung in smoke. The eyes opened. They were yellow. They narrowed deliriously on the two men standing over him.

"Soldiers of Liberty!" he greeted them.

He lay watching them search the room. They looked in the paneled sideboard, under the bed, behind a large garish canvas on the wall, in the wardrobe where they found a crumpled bombazine dress. In the wardrobe they also discovered a suit which contained in its pockets the correspondence between Guillermo Valencia and Monsieur Clémenceau, and a receipt for 50,000 francs. They returned to the bed.

"Where is it?"

"France is far, I hear you say!"

"Where is it?" One of them slapped the leather cheeks. "Or have you spent it all?"

The voice rattled. ". . . which is why we must set off immediately."

They dressed him from a pile of clothes on a chair by the door. The woman held her baby daughter in her arms, watching.

"Come on," said one.

"Where are you taking him?

"To show us Paris," said another.

She didn't understand. "He's a sick man."

The door slammed.

They took him in a hansom cab to the avenue Béco. He said nothing for the whole journey. His head lolled from side to side as if it was not properly attached to his shoulders. His eyes had a diseased sheen. His jacket was spotted with leaves. They arrived at the foundry. One of the men carried him into the building by the collar of his

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shirt. The other demanded a meeting with the *directeur général.*

Five minutes passed.

Clémenceau sent word he would see the gentlemen from Bolivia.

They abandoned Lizardo in a chair downstairs. A coughing attack made him too weak to walk. The doorman promised to attend him. Impatiently they climbed the stairs.

Clémenceau was not overjoyed by their arrival. They had interrupted an article he was writing for the *Revue de Métallurgie* on the subject of binary alloys, with special reference to Pierre Martin whom he accused of sounding the death knell on the puddling furnace. Nevertheless their arrival was something he had expected.

He replaced the top on his pen and sighed. From a drawer by his knee he slid out a folder. Then he walked round the desk to see how he could help the two councillors from Oruro.

"He cancelled me here. He cancelled me there." His fingers played piano on the designs he laid out. "He cancelled me everywhere."

Not hearing a word for two months, Clémenceau contacted Monsieur's Real's hotel. He had left.

"He still owed them money. If he can't pay his hotel bill, I thought, how can he pay us? I wrote to your mayor. Monsieur . . ." He searched through the correspondence. "There was the question of the deposit."

He looked again at the artist's proof. "Such a pity. A wonderful commission."

"Oh, we still want a statue of General Melgarejo," said one of the men. "That's why we're here."

That's why, popping with anger like a roasting guinea pig, Valencia had sent them. That's why on the morning he received Clémenceau's letter, not waiting for his beard trim at the Hotel Terminus, he had marched up the Calle Bolivar coiling his moustaches into a cactus-tangled fleece that trailed in a single coil behind him, and burst without a knock into the house next door, staying only

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to apologize to Señor Mendoza, the Fricke Company accountant, for having disturbed the love he was making so energetically to his *chola* cook, then appearing at the right door to tell Juan Alonso, his vice president that he had to set off for Paris immediately, to find out what had happened to Lizardo, the protégé who had failed him so dismally, and to bring back, as if his life depended on it, the town's monument to the Hero of December.

"But the deposit is all we have," added the other, Juan Alonso, now engaged to the stationmaster's daughter. "What will it buy us?"

"Fifty thousand francs?" Clémenceau closed the folder. "Less the artist's fee . . . Not much."

At that moment a terrific shout penetrated the window behind the desk. It was accompanied by the clashing and clanging of metal. The hubbub rose from the courtyard below. Clémenceau hurried over. He opened the window. His cheeks were pink.

"You'd better see for yourselves," he said eventually. The two men squeezed past the desk. They looked down on a small square of rusting statues, cracked molds and castoffs: Cupids without bows, Venuses with twisted ligaments, negroes bearing bent sundials, broken vases, benches, street lamps—and in the middle of this cast-iron, copper, phosphor-bronze detritus, a large equestrian statue of Marshal Ney.

The shouts were Lizardo's. He was mounted behind the hero of Borodino. He was kicking the green sides of Ney's horse with the heels of an untied shoe. He was hugging the rider, seeing in the shape of Napoleon's general the general of his delirium, taking the *via dolorosa* of exile after the coup of 1871, which had left him without money, without uniforms, without medals, with just his horse Holofernes.

He was shouting his agonized shouts because he had just discovered that the Indians, made homeless by Melgarejo, had lopped off Holofernes's ears.

"Fifty thousand francs," said Clémenceau, the perfectionist, ignoring the deranged figure of Lizardo stretch-

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ing forward to staunch the bleeding bronze, and seeing the cast he had rejected because it contained a percentage too much zinc, "might buy you that statue of Ney."

By the time they reached the courtyard, Lizardo Real had slipped from his saddle forever. He was buried in the Picpus cemetery, next to the guillotined body of a Carmelite nun. He was not yet thirty.

But his horse rode on, a slightly imperfect cast commissioned to celebrate the centenary of Borodino, the battle for which Marshal Ney, the red lion, the bravest of the brave, had won for himself the title Prince de la Moskova.

Transported with enormous difficulty to Bolivia—thirty stevedores had lowered it into the *Thuringia*'s hold—it was erected opposite Oruro's railway station to the rhapsodic squeal of a brass band and toasted by the whole community with *chicha.* The *chicha* soon flooded away Valencia's doubts, after he had jerked away the shroud at his third attempt, that General Melgarejo's features were somewhat finer than he remembered, his figure leaner, that he lacked a beard.

What could be the reason? Perhaps there was something about a clean chin, Valencia thought, searching for his own, concealed beneath its manicured tufts, and contemplating the bronze face above him. Maybe, after all, a beard was a little aging. Maybe there was no end to what not wearing a beard could do . . .

In the end men see what they want to see. Only Juan Alonso, who succeeded Valencia as Mayor a year later, knew the story behind the statue and Lizardo's dereliction. Nicanor Mendez, Lizardo's replacement as treasurer who had accompanied Ana's fiancé to Paris, took the secret to his grave in a field above Oruro where he had been able to purchase a small concession, a *pertenencia* of fifteen hectares, with the silence he sold to Alonso.

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Lizardo's family, like the rest of Oruro, knew nothing of this, believing he had died of incipient uraemia in 1912. Once a year, in the last Sunday in April, there was a mass for him, attended by Lizardo's uncle, who always promised his wife that he would touch neither drop nor playing card until the next day, by the sorceress who preferred her own incantations to the priest's, and for the first years by Ana, until one year she never turned up, confessing she had been worn down by her husband's unaccountable irritation whenever Lizardo's name was mentioned.

Today the monument still commands the square. On certain days, on feast days and for the four days of the *diablada,* its massive neck is garlanded with flowers and little children are lifted onto the plinth to scuttle between the legs. On the benches in its shadow, new generations listen to old men repeat the story of its rider, caught at the very moment he sets out across the barren plain, followed by his soldiers.

No ceremony attends the identical statue in the rue Lapin, lost in the trees. But if you were born in Oruro and you emerged one lunchtime from the bistro called Jean dans le Désert (where they serve a whiting *en colère,* tail in mouth, as if doubled in rage), you well might rub your eyes in astonishment at the vision of General Mariano Melgarejo galloping towards you, having finally crossed the seas to liberate France.

*

For his summary of General Melgarejo's life and achievements the author gratefully acknowledges the work of Max Daireaux in his book Melgarejo *(Paris, Calmann Levy, 1945).*

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Todas las artes, especialmente la pintura y la escultura, ~~son formas y cosas~~ materiales, al ser formas materiales, son cosas: pueden ordenarse o verdene y transformarse en objetos de especulación mercantil. La poesía también es cosa pero no es pura cosa: artificio de palabras. Pero ordenada de otro modo que no ocupa lugar ni el espacio. A la inversa del cuadro, el poema no muestra imágenes sino figuras: es un conjunto verbal que provoca en el lector (o en el oyente) una sucesión de imágenes mentales. La poesía se goza en los oídos pero se ve en el entendimiento.

La discordia entre poesía y modernidad no es

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accidental sino consubstancial. La aparición entre ambos aparece desde el comienzo de nuestra época, con los primeros románticos. La paradoja y querella ~~de~~ incompatibilidad es uno de los atributos, diría el central, de la poesía moderna. Sólo los modernos pueden ~~ser~~ tan fatal y desgarradoramente antimodernos como lo han sido todos nuestros grandes poetas. La modernidad, fundada en la crítica, secreta de su modelo material la crítica de sí misma. La poesía ha sido una de las manifestaciones más enérgicas y vivaces de esa crítica. Pero la crítica no ha sido ni racional ni pragmática sino pasional y en nombre de realidades negadas o humilladas por la Edad Moderna. La poesía ha sido la réplica y el antídoto de la modernidad. Así, al negarla, la ha vivificado

Two manuscript pages from The Other Voice, *an essay on poetry by Octavio Paz.*

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Octavio Paz

The Art of Poetry XLII

Though small in stature and well into his seventies, Octavio Paz, with his piercing eyes, gives the impression of being a much younger man. In his poetry and his prose works, which are both erudite and intensely political, he recurrently takes up such themes as the experience of Mexican history, especially as seen through its Indian past, and the overcoming of profound human loneliness through erotic love. Paz has long been considered, along with César Vallejo and Pablo Neruda, to be one of the great South American poets of the twentieth century; three days after this interview, which was conducted on Columbus Day

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1990, he joined Neruda among the ranks of Nobel laureates in literature.

Paz was born in 1914 in Mexico City, the son of a lawyer and the grandson of a novelist. Both figures were important to the development of the young poet: he learned the value of social causes from his father, who served as counsel for the Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, and was introduced to the world of letters by his grandfather. As a boy, Paz was allowed to roam freely through his grandfather's expansive library, an experience which afforded him invaluable exposure to Spanish and Latin American literature. He studied literature at the University of Mexico but moved on before earning a degree.

At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Paz sided immediately with the Republican cause and in 1937 left for Spain. After his return to Mexico, he helped found the literary reviews Taller *("Workshop") and* El Hijo Pródigo *("The Child Prodigy") out of which a new generation of Mexican writers emerged. In 1943 Paz traveled extensively in the United States on a Guggenheim Fellowship before entering into the Mexican diplomatic service in 1945. From 1946 until 1951, Paz lived in Paris. The writings of Sartre, Breton, Camus and other French thinkers whom he met at that time were to be an important influence on his own work. In the early 1950s Paz's diplomatic duties took him to Japan and India, where he first came into contact with the Buddhist and Taoist classics. He has said, "More than two thousand years away, western poetry is essential to Buddhist teaching: that the self is an illusion, a sum of sensations, thoughts and desire." In October 1968 Paz resigned his diplomatic post to protest the bloody repression of student demonstrations in Mexico City by the government.*

His first book of poems, Savage Moon, *appeared in 1933 when Paz was nineteen years old. Among his most highly acclaimed works are* The Labyrinth of Solitude *(1950), a prose study of the Mexican national character, and the book-length poem,* Sun Stone *(1957), called by J.M. Cohen "one of the last important poems to be published in the western world." The poem has 584 lines, representing the 584-day cycle of the planet Venus. Other works include* Eagle or Sun?

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(1950), Alternating Current *(1956),* The Bow and the Lyre *(1956),* Blanco *(1967),* The Monkey Grammarian *(1971),* A Draft of Shadows *(1975) and* A Tree Within *(1987).*

Paz lives in Mexico City with his wife Marie-José, who is an artist. He has taught at Cambridge University, the University of Texas, the University of Pittsburgh and Harvard University, where he has also received an honorary degree. He has been the recipient of numerous international prizes for poetry, including the International Grand Prix, the Jerusalem Prize (1977), the Neustadt Prize (1982), the Cervantes Prize (1981) and the Nobel Prize.

During this interview, which took place in front of an overflow audience at the 92nd Street Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association in New York, under the auspices of the Poetry Center, Paz displayed the energy and power typical of him and of his poetry, which draws upon an eclectic sexual mysticism to bridge the gap between the individual and society. Appropriately, Paz seemed to welcome this opportunity to communicate with his audience.

INTERVIEWER

Octavio, you were born in 1914, as you probably remember . . .

OCTAVIO PAZ

Not very well!

INTERVIEWER

. . . virtually in the middle of the Mexican Revolution and right on the eve of World War I. The century you've lived through has been one of almost perpetual war. Do you have anything good to say about the twentieth century?

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PAZ

Well, I have survived, and I think that's enough. History, you know, is one thing and our lives are something else. Our century has been terrible—one of the saddest in universal history—but our lives have always been more or less the same. Private lives are not historical. During the French or American revolutions, or during the wars between the Persians and the Greeks—during any great, universal event—history changes continually. But people live, work, fall in love, die, get sick, have friends, moments of illumination or sadness, and that has nothing to do with history. Or very little to do with it.

INTERVIEWER

So we are both in and out of history?

PAZ

Yes, history is our landscape or setting and we live through it. But the real drama, the real comedy also, is within us, and I think we can say the same for someone of the fifth century or for someone of a future century. Life is not historical, but something more like nature.

INTERVIEWER

In *The Privileges of Sight,* a book about your relationship with the visual arts, you say: "Neither I nor any of my friends had ever seen a Titian, a Velázquez, or a Cézanne. . . . Nevertheless, we were surrounded by many works of art." You talk there about Mixoac, where you lived as a boy, and the art of early twentieth-century Mexico.

PAZ

Mixoac is now a rather ugly suburb of Mexico City, but when I was a child it was a small village. A very old village, from pre-Colombian times. The name Mixoac comes from the god Mixcoatl, the Nahuatl name for the Milky Way. It also meant "Cloud Serpent," as if the Milky Way were a serpent of clouds. We had a small pyramid, a diminutive pyramid, but a pyramid neverthe-

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less. We also had a seventeenth-century convent. My neighborhood was called San Juan, and the parish church dated from the sixteenth century, one of the oldest in the area. There were also many eighteenth and nineteenth century houses, some with extensive gardens, because at the end of the nineteenth century Mixoac was a summer resort for the Mexican bourgeoisie. My family in fact had a summer house there. So when the revolution came, we were obliged, happily I think, to have to move there. We were surrounded by small memories of two pasts that remained very much alive, the pre-Colombian and the colonial.

INTERVIEWER

You talk in *The Privileges of Sight* about Mixoac's fireworks.

PAZ

I am very fond of fireworks. They were a part of my childhood. There was a part of the town where the artisans were all masters of the great art of fireworks. They were famous all over Mexico. To celebrate the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe, other religious festivals, and at New Year's, they made the fireworks for the town. I remember how they made the church façade look like a fiery waterfall. It was marvelous. Mixoac was alive with a kind of life that doesn't exist anymore in big cities.

INTERVIEWER

You seem nostalgic for Mixoac, yet you are one of the few Mexican writers who live right in the center of Mexico City. Soon it will be the largest city in the world, a dynamic city, but, in terms of pollution, congestion and poverty, a nightmare. Is living there an inspiration or a hindrance?

PAZ

Living in the heart of Mexico City is neither an inspiration nor an obstacle. It's a challenge. And the only way

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to deal with challenges is to face up to them. I've lived in other towns and cities in Mexico, but no matter how agreeable they are, they seem somehow unreal. At a certain point, my wife and I decided to move into the apartment where we live now. If you live in Mexico, you've got to live in Mexico City.

INTERVIEWER

Could you tell us something about the Paz family?

PAZ

My father was Mexican, my mother Spanish. An aunt lived with us—rather eccentric as aunts are supposed to be and poetic in her own absurd way. My grandfather was a lawyer and a writer, a popular novelist. As a matter of fact, during one period we lived off the sales of one of his books, a best-seller. The Mixoac house was his.

INTERVIEWER

What about books? I suppose I'm thinking about how Borges claimed he never actually left his father's library.

PAZ

It's a curious parallel. My grandfather had a beautiful library, which was the great thing about the Mixoac house. It had about six or seven thousand books, and I had a great deal of freedom to read. I was a voracious reader when I was a child and even read "forbidden" books because no one paid attention to what I was reading. When I was very young, I read Voltaire. Perhaps that led me to lose my religious faith. I also read novels that were more or less libertine, not really pornographic, just racy.

INTERVIEWER

Did you read any children's books?

PAZ

Of course. I read a lot of books by Salgari, an Italian author very popular in Mexico. And Jules Verne. One of

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my great heroes was an American, Buffalo Bill. My friends and I would pass from Alexandre Dumas's *Three Musketeers* to the cowboys without the slightest remorse or sense that we were warping history.

INTERVIEWER

You said once that the first time you saw a surrealist painting—a picture where vines were twisting through the walls of a house—you took it for realism.

PAZ

That's true. The Mixoac house gradually crumbled around us. We had to abandon one room after another because the roofs and walls kept falling down.

INTERVIEWER

When you were about sixteen in 1930, you entered the National Preparatory School. What did you study, and what was the school like?

PAZ

The school was beautiful. It was built at the end of the seventeenth century, the high point of the baroque in Mexican architecture. The school was big, and there was nobility in the stones, the columns, the corridors. And there was another aesthetic attraction. During the twenties, the government had murals painted in it by Orozco and Rivera—the first mural Rivera painted was in my school.

INTERVIEWER

So you felt attracted to the work of the muralists then?

PAZ

Yes, all of us felt a rapport with the muralists' expressionist style. But there was a contradiction between the architecture and the painting. Later on I came to think that it was a pity the murals were painted in buildings that didn't belong to our century.

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INTERVIEWER

What about the curriculum?

PAZ

It was a melange of the French tradition mixed with American educational theories. John Dewey, the American philosopher, was a big influence. Also the "progressive school" of education.

INTERVIEWER

So the foreign language you studied was French?

PAZ

And English. My father was a political exile during the revolution. He had to leave Mexico and take refuge in the United States. He went ahead and then we joined him in California, in Los Angeles, where we stayed for almost two years. On the first day of school, I had a fight with my American schoolmates. I couldn't speak a word of English, and they laughed because I couldn't say "spoon" during lunch hour. But when I came back to Mexico on my first day of school I had another fight. This time with my Mexican classmates and for the same reason—because I was a foreigner! I discovered I could be a foreigner in both countries.

INTERVIEWER

Were you influenced by any of your teachers in the National Preparatory School?

PAZ

Certainly. I had the chance to study with the Mexican poet Carlos Pellicer. Through him I met other poets of his generation. They opened my eyes to modern poetry. I should point out that my grandfather's library ended at the beginning of the twentieth century, so it wasn't until I was in the National Preparatory School that I learned books were published after 1910. Proust was a revelation

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for me. I thought no more novels had been written after Zola.

INTERVIEWER

What about poetry in Spanish?

PAZ

I found out about the Spanish poets of the Generation of 1927: García Lorca, Rafael Alberti and Jorge Guillén. I also read Antonio Machado and Juan Ramón Jiménez, who was a patriarch of poetry then. I also read Borges at that time, but remember Borges was not yet a short-story writer. During the early thirties he was a poet and an essayist. Naturally, the greatest revelation during that first period of my literary life was the poetry of Pablo Neruda.

INTERVIEWER

You went on to university, but in 1937 you made a momentous decision.

PAZ

Well, I made several. First I went to Yucatán. I finished my university work, but I left before graduating. I refused to become a lawyer. My family, like all Mexican middle-class families at that time, wanted their son to be a doctor or a lawyer. I only wanted to be a poet and also in some way a revolutionary. An opportunity came for me to go to Yucatán to work with some friends in a school for the children of workers and peasants. It was a great experience—it made me realize I was a city boy and that my experience of Mexico was that of central Mexico, the uplands.

INTERVIEWER

So you discovered geography?

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PAZ

People who live in cities like New York or Paris are usually provincials with regard to the rest of the country. I discovered Yucatán, a very peculiar province of southern Mexico. It's Mexico, but it's also something very different thanks to the influence of the Mayas. I found out that Mexico has another tradition beside that of central Mexico, another set of roots—the Maya tradition. Yucatán was strangely cosmopolitan. It had links with Cuba and New Orleans. As a matter of fact, during the nineteenth century, people from the Yucatán traveled more often to the United States or Europe than they did to Mexico City. I began to see just how complex Mexico is.

INTERVIEWER

So then you returned to Mexico City and decided to go to the Spanish Civil War?

PAZ

I was invited to a congress, and since I was a great partisan of the Spanish Republic I immediately accepted. I left the Yucatán school and went to Spain, where I stayed for some months. I wanted to enroll in the Spanish Loyalist Army—I was twenty-three—but I couldn't because as a volunteer I would have needed the recommendation of a political party. I wasn't a member of the Communist party or any other party, so there was no one to recommend me. I was rejected, but they told me that was not so important because I was a young writer—I was the youngest at the congress—and that I should go back to Mexico and write for the Spanish Republic. And that is what I did.

INTERVIEWER

What did that trip to Spain mean to you, above and beyond politics and the defense of the Spanish Republic?

PAZ

I discovered another part of my heritage. I was familiar, of course, with the Spanish literary tradition. I have

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always viewed Spanish literature as my own, but it's one thing to know books and another thing to see the people, the monuments and the landscape with your own eyes.

INTERVIEWER

So it was a geographical discovery again?

PAZ

Yes, but there was also the political or, to be more precise, the moral aspect. My political and intellectual beliefs were kindled by the idea of fraternity. We all talked a lot about it. For instance, the novels of André Malraux, which we all read, depicted the search for fraternity through revolutionary action. My Spanish experience did not strengthen my political beliefs, but it did give an unexpected twist to my idea of fraternity. One day—Stephen Spender was with me and might remember this episode—we went to the front in Madrid, which was in the university city. It was a battlefield. Sometimes in the same building the loyalists would only be separated from the fascists by a single wall. We could hear the soldiers on the other side talking. It was a strange feeling: those people facing me—I couldn't see them but only hear their voices—were my enemies. But they had human voices, like my own. They were like me.

INTERVIEWER

Did this affect your ability to hate your enemy?

PAZ

Yes. I began to think that perhaps all this fighting was an absurdity, but of course I couldn't say that to anyone. They would have thought I was a traitor, which I wasn't. I understood then, or later, when I could think seriously about that disquieting experience, I understood that real fraternity implies that you must accept the fact that your enemy is also human. I don't mean that you must be a friend to your enemy. No, differences will subsist, but your enemy is also human, and the moment you under-

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stand that you can no longer accept violence. For me it was a terrible experience. It shattered many of my deepest convictions.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that part of the horror of the situation resulted from the fact that the fascist soldiers were speaking your language?

PAZ

Yes. The soldiers on the other side of the wall were laughing and saying, "Give me a cigarette," and things like that. I said to myself, "Well, they are the same as we on this side of the wall."

INTERVIEWER

You didn't go straight back to Mexico, however.

PAZ

Of course not. It was my first trip to Europe. I had to go to Paris. Paris was a museum, it was history, it was the present. Walter Benjamin said Paris was the capital of the nineteenth century, and he was right, but I think Paris was also the capital of the twentieth century, the first part at least. Not that it was the political or economic or philosophic capital, but the artistic capital. For painting and the plastic arts in general but also for literature. Not because the best artists and writers lived in Paris but because of the great movements, right down to surrealism.

INTERVIEWER

What did you see that moved you?

PAZ

I went to the Universal Exposition and saw *Guernica,* which Picasso had just painted. I was twenty-three and had this tremendous opportunity to see the Picassos and Mirós in the Spanish pavilion. I didn't know many people

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in Paris, and by pure chance I went to an exhibition where I saw a painting by Max Ernst, *Europe after the Rain,* which made a deep impression on me.

INTERVIEWER

What about people?

PAZ

I met a Cuban writer who became very famous later, Alejo Carpentier. He invited me to a party at the house of the surrealist poet Robert Desnos. There was a huge crowd, many of them quite well known—but I didn't know a soul and felt lost. I was very young. Looking around the house, I found some strange objects. I asked the pretty lady of the house what they were. She smiled and told me they were Japanese erotic objects, "godemiches," and everyone laughed at my innocence. I realized just how provincial I was.

INTERVIEWER

You were back in Mexico in 1938. So were André Breton and Trotsky: did their presence mean anything to you?

PAZ

Of course. Politically, I was against Breton and Trotsky. I thought our great enemy was fascism, that Stalin was right, that we had to be united against fascism. Even though Breton and Trotsky were not agents of the Nazis, I was against them. On the other hand, I was fascinated by Trotsky. I secretly read his books, so inside myself I was a heterodox. And I admired Breton. I had read *L'Amour Fou,* a book that really impressed me.

INTERVIEWER

So in addition to Spanish and Spanish-American poetry you plunged into European modernism.

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PAZ

Yes, I would say there were three texts that made a mark on me during this period: the first was Eliot's "Waste Land," which I read in Mexico in 1931. I was seventeen or so, and the poem baffled me. I couldn't understand a word. Since then I've read it countless times and still think it one of the great poems of the century. The second text was Saint-John Perse's *Anabase,* and the third was Breton's small book, which exalted free love, poetry and rebellion.

INTERVIEWER

But despite your admiration you wouldn't approach Breton?

PAZ

Once a mutual friend invited me to see him, telling me I was wrong about Breton's politics. I refused. Many years later, I met him and we became good friends. It was then—in spite of being criticized by many of my friends—I read with enthusiasm the *Manifesto for a Revolutionary Independent Art* written by Breton and Trotsky and signed by Diego Rivera. In it Trotsky renounces political control of literature. The only policy the revolutionary state can have with regard to artists and writers is to give them total freedom.

INTERVIEWER

It would seem as though your internal paradox was turning into a crisis.

PAZ

I was against Socialist Realism, and that was the beginning of my conflicts with the Communists. I was not a member of the Communist party, but I was friendly with them. Where we fought first was about the problem of art.

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INTERVIEWER

So the exposition of surrealism in Mexico City in 1940 would have been a problem for you.

PAZ

I was the editor of a magazine, *Taller.* In it one of my friends published an article saying the surrealists had opened new vistas, but that they had become the academy of their own revolution. It was a mistake, especially during those years. But we published the article.

INTERVIEWER

Publish or perish.

PAZ

We must accept our mistakes. If we don't, we're lost, don't you think? This interview is in some ways an exercise in public confession—of which I am very much afraid.

INTERVIEWER

Octavio, despite the fact that you are a poet and an essayist, it seems that you have had novelistic temptations. I'm thinking of that "Diary of a Dreamer" you published in 1938 in your magazine *Taller* and *The Monkey Grammarian* of 1970.

PAZ

I wouldn't call that diary novelistic. It was a kind of notebook made up of meditations. I was probably under the spell of Rilke and his *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge.* The truth is that the novel has always been a temptation for me. But perhaps I am not suited to it. The art of the novel unites two different things. It is like epic poetry, a world peopled by characters whose actions are the essence of the work. But, unlike the epic, the novel is analytical. It tells the deeds of the characters and, at the same time, criticizes them. Tom Jones, Odette de Crécy,

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Ivan Karamazov or Don Quixote are characters devoured by criticism. You don't find that in Homer or Virgil. Not even in Dante. The epic exalts or condemns; the novel analyzes and criticizes. The epic heroes are one-piece, solid characters; novelistic characters are ambiguous. These two poles, criticism and epic, combine in the novel.

INTERVIEWER

What about *The Monkey Grammarian?*

PAZ

I wouldn't call that a novel. It's on the frontier of the novel. If it's anything, that book is an anti-novel. Whenever I'm tempted to write a novel, I say to myself, "Poets are not novelists." Some poets, like Goethe, have written novels—rather boring ones. I think the poetic genius is synthetic. A poet creates syntheses while the novelist analyzes.

INTERVIEWER

If we could return to Mexico during the war years, I would like to ask you about your relationship with Pablo Neruda, who was sent to Mexico as Consul General of Chile in 1940.

PAZ

As I said earlier, Neruda's poetry was a revelation for me when I started to read modern poetry in the thirties. When I published my first book, I sent a copy to Neruda. He never answered me, but it was he who invited me to the congress in Spain. When I reached Paris in 1937, I knew no one. But just as I was getting off the train, a tall man ran up to me shouting, "Octavio Paz! Octavio Paz!" It was Neruda. Then he said, "Oh you are so young!" and we embraced. He found me a hotel, and we became great friends. He was one of the first to take notice of my poetry and to read it sympathetically.

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INTERVIEWER

So what went wrong?

PAZ

When he came to Mexico, I saw him very often, but there were difficulties. First, there was a personal problem. Neruda was very generous, but also very domineering. Perhaps I was too rebellious and jealous of my own independence. He loved to be surrounded by a kind of court made up of people who loved him—sometimes these would be intelligent people but often they were mediocre. The second problem was politics. He became more and more Stalinist, while I became less and less enchanted with Stalin. Finally we fought—almost physically—and stopped speaking to each other. He wrote some not terribly nice things about me, including one nasty poem. I wrote some awful things about him. And that was that.

INTERVIEWER

Was there a reconciliation?

PAZ

For twenty years we didn't speak. We'd sometimes be at the same place at the same time, and I knew he would tell our mutual friends to stop seeing me because I was a "traitor." But then the Khrushchev report about the Stalinist terrors was made public and shattered his beliefs. We happened to be in London at the same poetry festival. I had just remarried, as had Pablo. I was with Marie-José, my wife, when we met Matilde Urrutia, his wife. She said, "If I'm not mistaken, you are Octavio Paz." To which I answered, "Yes, and you are Matilde." Then she said, "Do you want to see Pablo? I think he would love to see you again." We went to Pablo's room, where he was being interviewed by a journalist. As soon as the journalist left, Pablo said, "My son," and embraced me. The expression is very Chilean—"*mijito*"—

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and he said it with emotion. I was very moved, almost crying. We talked briefly, because he was on his way back to Chile. He sent me a book, I sent him one. And then a few years later, he died. It was sad, but it was one of the best things that has ever happened to me—the possibility to be friends again with a man I liked and admired so very much.

INTERVIEWER

The early forties were clearly difficult times for you, and yet they seem to have forced you to define your own intellectual position.

PAZ

That's true. I was having tremendous political problems, breaking with former friends—Neruda among them. I did make some new friends, like Victor Serge, a Franco-Russian writer, an old revolutionary. But I reached the conclusion that I had to leave my country, exile myself. I was fortunate because I received a Guggenheim fellowship to go to the United States. On this second visit, I went first to Berkeley and then to New York. I didn't know anyone, had no money, and was actually destitute. But I was really happy. It was one of the best periods of my life.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

PAZ

Well, I discovered the American people, and I was thrilled. It was like breathing deeply and freely while facing a vast space—a feeling of elation, lightness and confidence. I feel the same way every time I come to your country, but not with the same intensity. It was vivifying just to be in the States in those days, and, at the same time, I could step back from politics and plunge into poetry. I discovered American poetry in Conrad Aiken's *Anthology of Modern American Poetry.* I had already read

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Eliot, but I knew nothing about William Carlos Williams or Pound or Marianne Moore. I was slightly acquainted with Hart Crane's poetry—he lived his last years in Mexico, but he was more a legend than a body of poetry. While I was in Berkeley, I met Muriel Rukeyser who very generously translated some of my poems. That was a great moment for me. A few years later, she sent them to *Horizon,* which Spender and Cyril Conolly were editing in London, where they were published. For me it was a kind of . . .

INTERVIEWER

Small apotheosis?

PAZ

A very small apotheosis. After New York, where I became a great reader of *Partisan Review,* I went on to Paris and caught up with some friends I'd met in Mexico. Benjamin Péret for example. Through him, I finally met Breton. We became friends. Surrealism was in decline, but surrealism for French literary life was something healthy, something vital and rebellious.

INTERVIEWER

What do you mean?

PAZ

The surrealists embodied something the French had forgotten: the other side of reason, love, freedom, poetry. The French have a tendency to be too rationalistic, to reduce everything to ideas and then to fight over them. When I reached Paris, Jean-Paul Sartre was the dominant figure.

INTERVIEWER

But for you existentialism would have been old hat.

PAZ

That's right. In Madrid, the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset—and later his disciples in Mexico City and

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Buenos Aires—had published all the main texts of phenomenology and existentialism, from Husserl to Heidegger, so Sartre represented more a clever variation than an innovation. Also, I was against Sartre's politics. The one person connected to French existentialism with whom I was friendly and who was very generous to me was Albert Camus. But I must say I was nearer to the surrealist poets.

INTERVIEWER

By the end of the forties you had published two major books, the poems collected in *Freedom on Parole* (*Libertad bajo palabra*) and *The Labyrinth of Solitude.* I've always been curious about the title of *Freedom on Parole.* Does it have anything to do with the futurist poet Marinetti's "words on leave" (*parole in libertà*)?

PAZ

I'm afraid not. Marinetti wanted to free words from the chains of syntax and grammar, a kind of aesthetic nihilism. *Freedom on Parole* has more to do with morals than aesthetics. I simply wanted to say that human freedom is conditional. In English, when you are let out of jail you're "on parole," and "parole" means speech, word, word of honor. But the condition under which you are free is language, human awareness.

INTERVIEWER

So for you freedom of speech is more than the right to speak your mind?

PAZ

Absolutely. Ever since I was an adolescent I've been intrigued by the mystery of freedom. Because it is a mystery. Freedom depends on the very thing that limits or denies it, fate, God, biological or social determinism, whatever. To carry out its mission, fate counts on the complicity of our freedom, and to be free, we must overcome fate. The dialectics of freedom and fate is the theme of Greek tragedy and Shakespeare, although in Shake-

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speare fate appears as passion (love, jealousy, ambition, envy) and as chance. In Spanish theater—especially in Calderón and Tirso de Molina—the mystery of freedom expresses itself in the language of Christian theology: divine providence and free will. The idea of conditional freedom implies the notion of personal responsibility. Each of us, literally, either creates or destroys his own freedom. A freedom that is always precarious. And that brings up the title's poetic or aesthetic meaning: the poem—freedom—stands above an order—language.

INTERVIEWER

You wrote *Freedom on Parole* between 1935 and 1957, more than twenty years . . .

PAZ

I wrote and rewrote the book many times.

INTERVIEWER

Is it an autobiography?

PAZ

Yes and no. It expresses my aesthetic and personal experiences, from my earliest youth until the beginning of my maturity. I wrote the first poems when I was twenty-one, and I finished the last when I turned forty-three. But the real protagonist of those poems is not Octavio Paz but a half-real, half-mythical figure: the poet. Although that poet was my age, spoke my language, and his vital statistics were identical with my own, he was someone else. A figure, an image derived from tradition. Every poet is the momentary incarnation of that figure.

INTERVIEWER

Doesn't *The Labyrinth of Solitude* also have an autobiographical dimension?

PAZ

Again, yes and no. I wrote *The Labyrinth of Solitude* in Paris. The idea came to me in the United States when I

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tried to analyze the situation of the Mexicans living in Los Angeles, the *pachucos* or Chicanos as they're called now. I suppose they were a kind of mirror for me—the autobiographical dimension you like to see. That on one side. But there is also the relationship between Mexico and the United States. If there are two countries in the world that are different, they are the United States and Mexico. But we are condemned to live together forever. So we should try to understand each other and also to know ourselves. That was how *The Labyrinth of Solitude* began.

INTERVIEWER

That book deals with ideas such as difference, resentment, the hermetic nature of Mexican man, but it doesn't touch on the life of the poet.

PAZ

True. I tried to deal with that subject in a short essay called "Poetry of Solitude and Poetry of Communion." That article in some ways is the poetic equivalent of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* because it presents my vision of man, which is very simple. There are two situations for every human being. The first is the solitude we feel when we are born. Our first situation is that of orphanhood, and it is only later that we discover the opposite, filial attachment. The second is that because we are thrown, as Heidegger says, into this world, we feel we must find what the Buddhists call "the other share." This is the thirst for community. I think philosophy and religion derive from this original situation or predicament. Every country and every individual tries to resolve it in different ways. Poetry is a bridge between solitude and communion. Communion, even for a mystic like Saint John of the Cross, can never be absolute.

INTERVIEWER

Is this why the language of mysticism is so erotic?

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PAZ

Yes, because lovers, which is what the mystics are, constitute the greatest image of communion. But even between lovers solitude is never completely abolished. Conversely, solitude is never absolute. We are always with someone, even if it is only our shadow. We are never one—we are always "we." These extremes are the poles of human life.

INTERVIEWER

All in all, you spent some eight years abroad, first in the United States, then in Paris, and then in the Mexican diplomatic service. How do you view those years in the context of your career as a poet?

PAZ

Actually, I spent nine years abroad. If you count each of those years as a month, you'll find that those nine years were nine months which I lived in the womb of time. The years I lived in San Francisco, New York and Paris were a period of gestation. I was reborn, and the man who came back to Mexico at the end of 1952 was a different poet, a different writer. If I had stayed in Mexico, I probably would have drowned in journalism, bureaucracy or alcohol. I ran away from that world and also, perhaps, from myself.

INTERVIEWER

But you were hardly greeted as the prodigal son when you reappeared . . .

PAZ

I wasn't accepted at all, except by a few young people. I had broken with the predominant aesthetic, moral and political ideas and was instantly attacked by many people who were all too sure of their dogmas and prejudices. It was the beginning of a disagreement which has still not come to an end. It isn't simply an ideological difference

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of opinion. Certainly those polemics have been bitter and hard-fought, but even that does not explain the malevolence of some people, the pettiness of others, and the reticence of the majority. I've experienced despair and rage, but I've just had to shrug my shoulders and move forward. Now I see those quarrels as a blessing: if a writer is accepted, he'll soon be rejected or forgotten. I didn't set out to be a troublesome writer, but if that's what I've been, I am totally unrepentant.

INTERVIEWER

You left Mexico again in 1959.

PAZ

And I didn't come back until 1971. An absence of twelve years—another symbolic number. I returned because Mexico has always been a magnet I can't resist, a real passion, alternately happy and wretched like all passions.

INTERVIEWER

Tell me about those twelve years. First you went back to Paris, then to India as the Mexican Ambassador, and later to England and the United States.

PAZ

When I'd finished the definitive version of *Freedom on Parole,* I felt I could start over. I explored new poetic worlds, knew other countries, lived other sentiments, had other ideas. The first and greatest of my new experiences was India. Another geography, another humanity, other gods—a different kind of civilization. I lived there for just over six years. I traveled around the subcontinent quite a bit and lived for periods in Ceylon and Afghanistan—two more geographical and cultural extremes. If I had to express my vision of India in a single image, I would say that I see an immense plain: in the distance, white, ruinous architecture, a powerful river, a huge tree and in its shade a shape (a beggar, a Buddha, a pile of

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stones?). Out from among the knots and forks of the tree, a woman arises . . . I fell in love and got married in India.

INTERVIEWER

When did you become seriously interested in Asian thought?

PAZ

Starting with my first trip to the East in 1952—I spent almost a year in India and Japan—I made small incursions into the philosophic and artistic traditions of those countries. I visited many places and read some of the classics of Indian thought. Most important to me were the poets and philosophers of China and Japan. During my second stay in India, between 1962 and 1968, I read many of the great philosophic and religious texts. Buddhism impressed me profoundly.

INTERVIEWER

Did you think of converting?

PAZ

No, but studying Buddhism was a mental and spiritual exercise that helped me begin to doubt the ego and its mirages. Ego worship is the greatest idolatry of modern man. Buddhism for me is a criticism of the ego and of reality. A radical criticism that does not end in negation but in acceptance. All the great Buddhist sanctuaries in India (the Hindu sanctuaries as well, but those, perhaps because they're later, are more baroque and elaborate) contain highly sensual sculptures and reliefs. A powerful but peaceful sexuality. I was shocked to find that exaltation of the body and of natural powers in a religious and philosophic tradition that disparages the world and preaches negation and emptiness. That became the central theme of a short book I wrote during those years, *Conjunctions and Disjunctions.*

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INTERVIEWER

Was it hard to balance being Mexican Ambassador to India with your explorations of India?

PAZ

My ambassadorial work was not arduous. I had time, I could travel and write. And not only about India. The student movements of 1968 fascinated me. In a certain way I felt the hopes and aspirations of my own youth were being reborn. I never thought it would lead to a revolutionary transformation of society, but I did realize that I was witnessing the appearance of a new sensibility that in some fashion *rhymed* with what I had felt and thought before.

INTERVIEWER

You felt that history was repeating itself?

PAZ

In a way. The similarity between some of the attitudes of the 1968 students and the surrealist poets, for example, was clear to see. I thought William Blake would have been sympathetic to both the words and the actions of those young people. The student movement in Mexico was more ideological than in France or the United States, but it too had legitimate aspirations. The Mexican political system, born out of the Revolution, had survived but was suffering a kind of historical arteriosclerosis. On October 2, 1968 the Mexican government decided to use violence to suppress the student movement. It was a brutal action. I felt I could not go on serving the government, so I left the diplomatic corps.

INTERVIEWER

You went to Paris and then to the United States before spending that year at Cambridge.

PAZ

Yes, and during those months I reflected on the recent history of Mexico. The Revolution began in 1910 with

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great democratic ambitions. More than half a century later, the nation was controlled by a paternalistic, authoritarian party. So in 1969 I wrote a postscript to *The Labyrinth of Solitude,* a "critique of the pyramid," which I took to be the symbolic form of Mexican authoritarianism. I stated that the only way of getting beyond the political and historical crisis we were living through—the paralysis of the institutions created by the Revolution—was to begin democratic reform.

INTERVIEWER

But that was not necessarily what the student movement was seeking.

PAZ

No. The student leaders and the left-wing political groups favored violent social revolution. They were under the influence of the Cuban Revolution—and there are still some who defend Fidel Castro even today. My point of view put me in opposition, simultaneously, to the government and the left. The "progressive" intellectuals, almost all of whom wanted to establish a totalitarian socialist regime, attacked me vehemently. I fought back. Rather, *we* fought back: A small group of younger writers agreed with some of my opinions. We all believed in a peaceful, gradual move toward democracy. We founded *Plural,* a magazine that would combine literature, art and political criticism. There was a crisis, so we founded another, *Vuelta* ("Return"), which is still going strong and has a faithful, demanding readership. Mexico has changed, and now most of our old enemies say they are democratic. We are living through a transition to democracy, one that will have its setbacks and will seem too slow for some.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see yourself as part of a long line of Latin American statesmen-writers, one that could include Ar-

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gentina's Sarmiento in the nineteenth and Neruda in the twentieth century?

PAZ

I don't think of myself as a "statesman-poet," and I'm not really comparable to Sarmiento or Neruda. Sarmiento was a real statesman and a great political figure in addition to being a great writer. Neruda was a poet, a great poet. He joined the Communist party, but for generous, semi-religious reasons. It was a real conversion. So his political militance was not that of an intellectual but of a believer. Within the Party, he seems to have been a political pragmatist, but, again, he was more like one of the faithful than a critical intellectual. As for me, well, I've never been a member of any political party, and I've never run for public office. I have been a political and social critic, but always from the marginal position of an independent writer. I'm not a joiner, although of course I've had and have my personal preferences. I'm different from Mario Vargas Llosa, who did decide to intervene directly in his country's politics. Vargas Llosa is like Havel in Czechoslovakia or Malraux in France after World War II.

INTERVIEWER

But it is almost impossible to separate politics from literature or any aspect of culture.

PAZ

Since the Enlightenment, there has been a constant confluence of literature, philosophy and politics. In the English-speaking world you have Milton as an antecedent as well as the great Romantics in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, there are many examples. Eliot, for instance, was never an active participant in politics, but his writing is an impassioned defense of traditional values, values that have a political dimension. I mention Eliot, whose beliefs are totally different from

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my own, simply because he too was an independent writer who joined no party. I consider myself a private person, although I reserve the right to have opinions and to write about matters that affect my country and my contemporaries. When I was young, I fought against Nazi totalitarianism and later on against the Soviet dictatorship. I don't regret either struggle in the slightest.

INTERVIEWER

Thinking about your time in India now and its effect on your poetry, what would you say about the influence of India?

PAZ

If I hadn't lived in India, I could not have written *Blanco* or most of the poems in *Eastern Slope.* The time I spent in Asia was a huge pause, as if time had slowed down and space had become larger. In a few rare moments, I experienced those states of being in which we are at one with the world around us, when the doors of time seem to open, if only slightly. We all live those instants in our childhood, but modern life rarely allows us to reexperience them when we're adults. As regards my poetry, that period begins with *Salamander,* culminates in *Eastern Slope,* and ends with *The Monkey Grammarian.*

INTERVIEWER

But didn't you write *The Monkey Grammarian* in 1970, the year you spent at Cambridge University?

PAZ

I did. It was my farewell to India. That year in England also changed me. Especially because of what we must necessarily refer to as English "civility," which includes the cultivation of eccentricity. That taught me not only to respect my fellow man but trees, plants and birds as well. I also read certain poets. Thanks to Charles Tomlin-

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son, I discovered Wordsworth. *The Prelude* became one of my favorite books. There may be echoes of it in *A Draft of Shadows.*

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a schedule for writing?

PAZ

I've never been able to maintain a fixed schedule. For years, I wrote in my few free hours. I was quite poor and from an early age had to hold down several jobs to eke out a living. I was a minor employee in the National Archive; I worked in a bank; I was a journalist; I finally found a comfortable but busy post in the diplomatic service, but none of those jobs had any real effect on my work as a poet.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have to be in any specific place in order to write?

PAZ

A novelist needs his typewriter, but you can write poetry any time, anywhere. Sometimes I mentally compose a poem on a bus or walking down the street. The rhythm of walking helps me fix the verses. Then when I get home, I write it all down. For a long time when I was younger, I wrote at night. It's quieter, more tranquil. But writing at night also magnifies the writer's solitude. Nowadays I write during the late morning and into the afternoon. It's a pleasure to finish a page when night falls.

INTERVIEWER

Your work never distracted you from your writing?

PAZ

No, but let me give you an example. Once I had a totally infernal job in the National Banking Commission (how I got it, I can't guess) which consisted in counting

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packets of old banknotes already sealed and ready to be burned. I had to make sure each packet contained the requisite three thousand pesos. I almost always had one banknote too many or too few—they were always fives—so I decided to give up counting them and to use those long hours to compose a series of sonnets in my head. Rhyme helped me retain the verses in my memory, but not having paper and pencil made my task much more difficult. I've always admired Milton for dictating long passages from *Paradise Lost* to his daughters. Unrhymed passages at that!

INTERVIEWER

Is it the same when you write prose?

PAZ

Prose is another matter. You have to write it in a quiet, isolated place, even if that happens to be the bathroom. But above all to write it's essential to have one or two dictionaries at hand. The telephone is the writer's devil, the dictionary his guardian angel. I used to type, but now I write everything in longhand. If it's prose, I write it out one, two or three times and then dictate it into a tape recorder. My secretary types it out, and I correct it. Poetry I write and rewrite constantly.

INTERVIEWER

What is the inspiration or starting-point for a poem? Can you give an example of how the process works?

PAZ

Each poem is different. Often the first line is a gift, I don't know if from the gods or from that mysterious faculty called inspiration. Let me use *Sun Stone* as an example: I wrote the first thirty verses as if someone were silently dictating them to me. I was surprised at the fluidity with which those hendecasyllabic lines appeared one after another. They came from far off and from nearby, from within my own chest. Suddenly the current stopped

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flowing. I read what I'd written: I didn't have to change a thing. But it was only a beginning, and I had no idea where those lines were going. A few days later, I tried to get started again, not in a passive way but trying to orient and direct the flow of verses. I wrote another thirty or forty lines. I stopped. I went back to it a few days later and, little by little, I began to discover the theme of the poem and where it was all heading.

INTERVIEWER

A figure began to appear in the carpet?

PAZ

It was a kind of a review of my life, a resurrection of my experiences, my concerns, my failures, my obsessions. I realized I was living the end of my youth and that the poem was simultaneously an end and a new beginning. When I reached a certain point, the verbal current stopped, and all I could do was repeat the first verses. That is the source of the poem's circular form. There was nothing arbitrary about it. *Sun Stone* is the last poem in the book that gathers together the first period of my poetry: *Freedom on Parole* (1935–1957). Even though I didn't know what I would write after that, I was sure that one period of my life and my poetry had ended, and another was beginning.

INTERVIEWER

But the title seems to allude to the cyclical Aztec concept of time.

PAZ

While I was writing the poem, I was reading an archeological essay about the Aztec calendar, and it occurred to me to call the poem *Sun Stone.* I added or cut—I don't remember which—three or four lines so that the poem would coincide with the 584 days of the conjunction of Venus with the Sun. But the time of my poem is not the

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ritual time of Aztec cosmogony but human, biographical time, which is linear.

INTERVIEWER

But you thought seriously enough about the numerical symbolism of 584 to limit the number of verses in the poem to that number.

PAZ

I confess that I have been and am still fond of numerological combinations. Other poems of mine are also built around certain numerical proportions. It isn't an eccentricity, but a part of the Western tradition. Dante is the best example. *Blanco,* however, was completely different from *Sun Stone.* First I had the *idea* for the poem. I made notes and even drew some diagrams which were inspired, more or less, by Tibetan mandalas. I conceived it as a spatial poem which would correspond to the four points on the compass, the four primary colors, etc. It was difficult because poetry is a temporal art. As if to prove it, the words themselves wouldn't come. I had to call them and, even though it may seem I'm exaggerating, *invoke* them. One day, I wrote the first lines. As was to be expected they were about words, how they appear and disappear. After those first ten lines, the poem began to flow with relative ease. Of course, there were, as usual, anguishing periods of sterility followed by others of fluidity. The architecture of *Blanco* is more sharply defined than that of *Sun Stone,* more complex, richer.

INTERVIEWER

So you defy Edgar Allan Poe's injunction against the long poem?

PAZ

With great relish. I've written other long poems, like *A Draft of Shadows* and *Carta de creencia* which means "letter of faith." The first is the monologue of memory

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and its inventions—memory changes and recreates the past as it revives it. In that way, it transforms the past into the present, into presence. *Carta de creencia* is a cantata where different voices converge. But, like *Sun Stone,* it's still a linear composition.

INTERVIEWER

When you write a long poem, do you see yourself as part of an ancient tradition?

PAZ

The long poem in modern times is very different from what it was in antiquity. Ancient poems, epics or allegories, contain a good deal of stuffing. The genre allowed and even demanded it. But the modern long poem tolerates neither stuffing nor transitions, for several reasons. First, with inevitable exceptions like Pound's *Cantos,* because our long poems are simply not as long as those of the ancients. Second, because our long poems contain two antithetical qualities: the *development* of the long poem and the *intensity* of the short poem. It's very difficult to manage. Actually, it's a new genre. And that's why I admire Eliot: his long poems have the same intensity and concentration as short poems.

INTERVIEWER

Is the process of writing enjoyable or frustrating?

PAZ

Writing is a painful process that requires huge effort and sleepless nights. In addition to the threat of writer's block, there is always the sensation that failure is inevitable. Nothing we write is what we wish we could write. Writing is a curse. The worst part of it is the anguish that precedes the act of writing—the hours, days or months when we search in vain for the phrase that turns the spigot that makes the water flow. Once that first phrase is written, everything changes: the process is enthralling,

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vital and enriching, no matter what the final result is. Writing is a blessing!

INTERVIEWER

How and why does an idea seize you? How do you decide if it is prose or poetry?

PAZ

I don't have any hard-and-fast rules for this. For prose, it would seem that the idea comes first, followed by a desire to develop the idea. Often, of course, the original idea changes, but even so the essential fact remains the same: prose is a means, an instrument. But in the case of poetry, the poet becomes the instrument. Whose? It's hard to say. Perhaps language. I don't mean automatic writing. For me, the poem is a *premeditated* act. But poetry flows from a psychic well related to language, that is, related to the culture and memory of a people. An ancient, impersonal spring intimately linked to verbal rhythm.

INTERVIEWER

But doesn't prose have a rhythm as well?

PAZ

Prose does have a rhythm, but that rhythm is not its constitutive element as it is in poetry. Let's not confuse metrics with rhythm: meter may be a manifestation of rhythm, but it is different because it has become mechanical. Which is why, as Eliot suggests, from time to time meter has to return to spoken, everyday language, which is to say, to the original rhythms every language has.

INTERVIEWER

Verse and prose are, therefore, separate entities?

PAZ

Rhythm links verse to prose: one enriches the other. The reason why Whitman was so seductive was precisely

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because of his surprising fusion of prose and poetry. A fusion produced by rhythm. The prose poem is another example, although its powers are more limited. Of course, being prosaic in poetry can be disastrous, as we see in so many inept poems in "free verse" every day. As to the influence of poetry on prose—just think about Chateaubriand, Nerval or Proust. In Joyce, the boundary between prose and poetry sometimes completely disappears.

INTERVIEWER

Can you always keep that boundary sharp?

PAZ

I try to keep them separate, but it doesn't always work. A prose piece, without my having to think about it, can become a poem. But I've never had a poem turn into an essay or a story. In some books—*Eagle or Sun?* and *The Monkey Grammarian*—I've tried to bring the prose right up to the border with poetry, I don't know with how much success.

INTERVIEWER

We've talked about premeditation and revision: how does inspiration relate to them?

PAZ

Inspiration and premeditation are two phases in the same process. Premeditation needs inspiration and vice-versa. It's like a river: the water can only flow between the two banks that contain it. Without premeditation, inspiration just scatters. But the role of premeditation—even in a reflexive genre like the essay—is limited. As you write, the text becomes autonomous, changes, and somehow forces you to follow it. The text always separates itself from the author.

INTERVIEWER

Then why revise?

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PAZ

Insecurity. No doubt about it. Also a senseless desire for perfection. I said that all texts have their own life, independent of the author. The poem doesn't express the poet. It expresses poetry. That's why it is legitimate to revise and correct a poem. Yes, and at the same time respect the poet who wrote it. I mean the poet, not the man we were then. I was that poet, but I was also someone else—that figure we talked about earlier. The poet is at the service of his poems.

INTERVIEWER

But just how much revising do you do? Do you ever feel a work is complete, or is it abandoned?

PAZ

I revise incessantly. Some critics say too much, and they may be right. But if there's a danger in revising, there is much more danger in not revising. I believe in inspiration, but I also believe that we've got to help inspiration, restrain it and even contradict it.

INTERVIEWER

Thinking again on the relationship between inspiration and revision, did you ever attempt the kind of automatic writing the surrealists recommended in the first surrealist manifesto?

PAZ

I did experiment with "automatic writing." It's very hard to do. Actually, it's *impossible.* No one can write with his mind blank, not thinking about what he's writing. Only God could write a real automatic poem because only for God are speaking, thinking and acting the same thing. If God says, "A horse!" a horse immediately appears. But a poet has to *reinvent* his horse, that is, his poem. He has to think it, and he has to make it. All the automatic poems I wrote during the time of my friendship with the surrealists were thought and written with

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a certain deliberation. I wrote those poems with my eyes open.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think Breton was serious when he advocated automatic writing?

PAZ

Perhaps he was. I was extremely fond of André Breton, really admired him. It's no exaggeration to say he was a solar figure because his friendship emitted light and heat. Shortly after I met him, he asked me for a poem for a surrealist magazine. I gave him a prose poem, "*Mariposa de obsidiana*"—it alludes to a pre-Colombian goddess. He read it over several times, liked it, and decided to publish it. But he pointed out one line that seemed weak. I reread the poem, discovered he was right, and removed the phrase. He was charmed, but I was confused. So I asked him, "What about automatic writing?" He raised his leonine head and answered without changing expression: "That line was a journalistic intromission . . ."

INTERVIEWER

It's curious, Octavio, how often a tension allows you to find your own special place—the United States and Mexico, the *pachuco* and Anglo-American society, solitude and communion, poetry and prose. Do you yourself see a tension between your essays and your poetry?

PAZ

If I start to write, the thing I love to write most, the thing I love most to create, is poetry. I would much rather be remembered for two or three short poems in some anthology than as an essayist. However, since I am a modern and live in a century that believes in reason and explanation, I find I am in a tradition of poets who in one way or another have written defenses of poetry. Just

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think of the Renaissance and then again of the Romantics—Shelley, Wordsworth in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads.* Well, now that I'm at the end of my career, I want to do two things: to keep on writing poetry and to write another defense of poetry.

INTERVIEWER

What will it say?

PAZ

I've just written a book, *The Other Voice,* about the situation of poetry in the twentieth century. When I was young, my great idols were poets and not novelists—even though I admired novelists like Proust or Lawrence. Eliot was one of my idols, but so were Valéry and Apollinaire. But poetry today is like a secret cult whose rites are celebrated in the catacombs, on the fringes of society. Consumer society and commercial publishers pay little attention to poetry. I think this is one of society's diseases. I don't think we can have a good society if we don't also have good poetry. I'm sure of it.

INTERVIEWER

Television is being criticized as the ruination of twentieth-century life, but you have the unique opinion that television will be good for poetry as a return to the oral tradition.

PAZ

Poetry existed before writing. Essentially, it is a verbal art, that enters us not only through our eyes and understanding but through our ears as well. Poetry is something spoken and heard. It's also something we see and write. In that we see the importance in the Oriental and Asian traditions of calligraphy. In the West, in modern times, typography has also been important—the maximum example in this would be Mallarmé. In television, the aural aspect of poetry can join with the visual and

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with the idea of movement—something books don't have. Let me explain: this is a barely explored possibility. So I'm not saying television *will* mean poetry's return to an oral tradition but that it *could* be the beginning of a tradition in which writing, sound and images will unite. Poetry always uses all the means of communication the age offers it: musical instruments, printing, radio, records. Why shouldn't it try television? We've got to take a chance.

INTERVIEWER

Will the poet always be the permanent dissident?

PAZ

Yes. We have all won a great battle in the defeat of the Communist bureaucracies by themselves—and that's the important thing: they were defeated by themselves and not by the West. But that's not enough. We need more social justice. Free-market societies produce unjust and very stupid societies. I don't believe that the production and consumption of things can be the meaning of human life. All great religions and philosophies say that human beings are more than producers and consumers. We cannot reduce our lives to economics. If a society without social justice is not a good society, a society without poetry is a society without dreams, without words, and, most importantly, without that bridge between one person and another that poetry is. We are different from the other animals because we can talk, and the supreme form of language is poetry. If society abolishes poetry it commits spiritual suicide.

INTERVIEWER

Is your extensive critical study of the seventeenth-century Mexican nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz a kind of projection of the present onto the past?

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PAZ

In part, but I also wanted to recover a figure I consider essential not only for Mexicans but for all of the Americas. At first, Sor Juana was buried and forgotten; then she was disinterred and mummified. I wanted to bring her back into the light of day, free her from the wax museum. She's alive and has a great deal to tell us. She was a great poet, the first in a long line of great Latin American women poets—let's not forget that Gabriela Mistral from Chile was the first Latin American writer to win the Nobel Prize. Sor Juana was also an intellectual of the first rank (which we can't say for Emily Dickinson) and a defender of women's rights. She was put on a pedestal and praised, then persecuted and humiliated. I just had to write about her.

INTERVIEWER

Finally, whither Octavio Paz? Where do you go from here?

PAZ

Where? I asked myself that question when I was twenty, again when I was thirty, again when I was forty, fifty . . . I could never answer it. Now I know something: I have to persist. That means live, write and face, like everyone else, the other side of every life—the unknown.

—Alfred MacAdam

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Daniel Halpern

Infidelities

I

I read somewhere that every love
has its own government. Or was it
that every love has
the government it deserves?
What is ours?
The heat of August is thick,
an unwoven blanket of air,
damp, present and persistent.
Here, we two representatives
half-sleep some place half-known,
remembered only
in moments of utter distraction,
but never in despair.
Before we depart, gain again
our former lives, we might
for the sake of transition
gaze a few moments
at the adjacent apartment house at dusk,
each window a single friendly frame
of others nearly like us, caught
in a life carried on
without the negotiations of duplicity.
We take up the habit
of referring to others
in the third person once-removed,
while for us there's only
the everlasting present: we walk out

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into the general evening and you say
it's like walking out
of a deeply engaging matinee:
so much sudden light,
so much going on,
so much of what came before
still residing in us.
Is the frantic siren
playing our song?
You nearly say what we're committed
to saying never, the understood unsaid—
even here there are laws and rights
to protect the guilty,
even if the jury's always in.
Our penalty,
with conviction or without:
life sentences,
back-to-back.

II

There's a gray cat who's not allowed into the house
where our cat for twenty years has been the one cat.

There's a storm working over the low mountains,
building with a stillness of air and light

over the nearest peaks. And soon the rain,
the full storm gets underway, thunder and light,

the passing thickness of air, the sudden rush
of wind, and the sheet of rain spraying the valley.

The gray cat presses against the door frame, and we
sit
down to dinner, our cat in the third chair, the stew

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done right and placed on the table, the wine poured.
The evening survives the storm and we walk out for a look

at what's left. A moon finally free, a hostage
sprung from a Jihad of clouds breaking up. The wet grass

regains its starch from this afternoon's wet heat,
and the gray cat emerges from under the porch steps,

dry but intense, charging our legs and getting over
in the language of cats her wish to enter our lives.

In the window, mirroring the table lamp, our cat,
shrewd, disappointed, and accusatory, studies us.

She's hurt and shows no apparent sympathy for a sister
left to the cold of the outside world. We're not surprised,

she's an indoor cat, her claws clipped, her movements
suited to the angles of furniture, the surface of rugs.

She will stand before her bowl of food and demand our best,
a gourmet cat when hungry: squab, fillet, hearts of chicken.

III

Adjoining suites in cities halfway round the world.
Flowers for your room or mine?—we are all of us
so thoughtful by distance, by way of longing
known only to those left what once was shared, shared

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dailiness. The sun sets in Malaysia, comes up
in Malawi, sets again almost anywhere. There's local
beer
in Srinagar, dangerous fish to consume at gold prices
in Tokyo, dishes spiced with ground cumin
along the North African coast—part of the
experience.

Don't forget postcards: Etc., Love, . . .
Don't eat salads east of the Mediterranean;
in general, leave the uncooked to local consumption.
For the last night there's suddenly a balcony,
a table set for one, mirrored by an adjoining table,
set for one, a vase of flowers each, a flinty white
from Chablis, a napkin bleached and starched stiff.
Two,
under whatever local weather can manage. To
departure!
To one more long flight back. To the airline's pressed
meat.
To the whimsy of airport control. To the profound
second-rate paperback novel whose hapless characters
in their tireless sprint around the track of love
will accompany you the full distance home.

IV

We talked in the oyster bars
and on the streets the homeless
entertained us, dancing or singing,
clowning for the homeowners, hats out,
hands out, moving.
Strolling
is what we do here, destination
left for later. And later we're somewhere dark,
the music higher, off the street,

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an arena of candlelit tables, black leather
actors playing the role of waiters
and bad wine poured out of unmarked jugs
which we drink with impunity.

There are those listening to music,
those trading one practiced gesture for another.
Where do we go from here? The set's ended
and the food begins to arrive at the tables.

Back on the street it's late, dangerous
if you read the papers or listen to the cabbies.
There's a moon hung up there but it's soiled.
There are stars too somewhere, but hidden
behind this air, thick with accrual—of
everything about life in this town.
We can talk away by one body of water or another,
the evening's finished and we are like everything
here,
strangers like everyone, without destination,
parting with nothing left to say.

V

There's a rich, humid park that carries on for acres.
It might be placed downtown, or simply midtown,
in a large, unknowable midwestern city, near a lake
whose native game fish draw those with time on their
hands
from both East and West. Chartered boats, guides,
rented gear to fit the tall and short, the hip and
guileless.

The two of us meet Wednesday afternoons there,
beneath hundred-year-old oaks that on sunny days toss
shade

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no less than a hundred feet. We meet there with
blankets
and a bag of prepared lunch. The city sirens that work
the periphery of the park sing with care what we like
to call,
simply, *our song.* We sip our wine, we mouth the
lyrics

of what needs to be everlasting. We note what wants
attention:
our careful dress, the casual play of hair and
percentage
of color in the other's complexion, blood at the
surface,
superior attention is how we begin to understand the
face
looking back, filled with expression, looking for the
necessary
translation, required understanding. On the sea

it's red sky at night, sailor's delight, simple directions.
Buoys: red right returning. Our damp hands, finally
freed,
mean business if we allow the passing on of substance.
We'll look for signs deep in the agates of vision,
peepholes
into the deep emotional stations we call our hearts.
Not even the storm forming overhead will drive us
back.

Not even the inclement work of weather will defeat
the good purpose
of this afternoon. A freight train pulls a hundred
Chryslers
up the hill we've yet to coin a name for, claim as one
more

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possession, one more part of the memory—we with
little else
than an afternoon to spare in the sparse post-storm
light.
We want it this lingering way: constant renaming,
constant return.

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Two Poems by Marilyn Hacker

Elysian Fields

"Champs Elysées of Broadway" says the awning
of the café where, every Sunday morning,
young lawyers in old jeans ripped at the knees
do crosswords. Polyglot Lebanese
own it: they've taken on two more shopfronts
and run their banner down all three at once.
Four years ago, their sign, "Au Petit Beurre"
was so discreet, that, meeting someone there,
I'd tell her the street corner, not the name.
They were in the right place at the right time.
Meanwhile, the poor are trying hard enough.
Outside, on Broadway, people sell their stuff
laid out on blankets, cardboard cartons, towels.
A stout matron with lacquered auburn curls
circles the viridian throw rug
and painted plaster San Martín to hug
a thinner, darker woman, who hugs her
back volubly in Spanish—a neighbor,
I guess, and guess they still have houses.
The man with uncut, browned French paperbacks,
the man with two embroidered gypsy blouses
and three pilled pitiful pairs of plaid slacks
folded beside him on the pavement where
there was a Puerto Rican hardware store
that's been a vacant shopfront for two years
may not. There's a young couple down the block
from our corner: she's tall, gaunt, gangly, black;
he's short, quick, volatile, unshaven, white.
They set up shop dry mornings around eight.
I've seen him slap her face, jerking her thin
arm like a rag doll's—a dollar kept from him,

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she moves too slow, whore, stupid bitch . . . "She's
my wife," he tells a passing man who stops
and watches. If anyone did call the cops
it would be to prevent them and their stacks
of old *Vogues* and outdated science texts
from blocking access to the "upscale bar"
where college boys get bellicose on beer.
"Leave him," would I say? Does she have keys
to an apartment, to a room, a door
to close behind her? What we meant by "poor"
when I was twenty, was a tenement
with clanking pipes and roaches; what we meant
was up six flights of grimed, piss-pungent stairs,
four babies and a baby-faced welfare
worker forbidden to say "birth control."
I was almost her, on the payroll
of New York State Employment Services
—the East 14th Street Branch, whose task it was
to send day-workers, mostly black, to clean
other people's houses. Five-fifteen
and I walked east, walked south, walked up my four
flights. Poor was a neighbor, was next door,
is still a door away. The door is mine.
Outside, the poor work Broadway in the rain.
The cappuccino drinkers watch them pass
under the awning from behind the glass.

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Cleis

She's sixteen, and looks like a full-grown woman,
teen-aged status hinted at by the acne.
I remember infancy's gold, unblemished
skin. I remember

every time I scolded her, slapped her, wished her
someone whom she wasn't, and let her know it.
Every mother knows she betrays her daughter.
Does she? Maybe.

She was not the builder of model airplanes.
She was not the runner I never could be.
She was not the pillager of my bookshelves,
Rimbaud, or Brontë.

She was not the heroine of a novel.
She was only eight, with a perfect body
caught above the swimming pool, midair, leaping
into blue water

(snapshot: 1982, Vence; she joined me
Air France Unaccompanied Minor). She's the
basic human integer, brown-skinned, golden,
wingless, but flying.

She has breasts and buttocks to keep her earth-bound
now. She rereads children's books in her loft bed:
Little Women, Anne of Green Gables, Robin
Hood, and *Black Beauty*

—dreaming herself back out of adolescence
while she talks of cars and her own apartment.
Sixteen is a waiting room: older, younger,
anything's better

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Every day a little bit more a grown-up
face not known yet superimposed on her face
as it turns, a sunflower, out of childhood
"bright and amazing"

like one of her lullabyes (by a poet
ragged, old, incontinent, isolated
in a walk-up cluttered with rocks and papers
now; a flamboyant

balladeer, once): cats by the fire in winter,
magic cat-king purring beside the singer,
famine and despair in the cries of scrawny
cats on the pavement.

Years now since I stroked her and sang that to her.
Since her breasts grew, I haven't seen her naked.
Infant sweat's like lavender-water; hers is
womanly, pungent.

When I was in love with her, with a lover's
tendency to mythify the beloved,
did I know her better than I do now, when
we know our limits?

Now she is a traveler like the others:
blonde braid, man's hat, jeans and a gray tweed
blazer,
pushing one old dufflebag on a trolley,
free, in an airport

full of haggard voyagers coming, going.
She stops, sees me. Under the sign ARRIVALS
we embrace, and heft the old bag up, one strap
each, on our shoulders.

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T. Crunk

Redemption

I

Driving through the mining counties
Green River to Central City
light of dawn like water
shadows rising to the surface

going back for my grandmother's funeral:
in Muhlenberg
a raised welt of railroad tracks
bitter porches emptying to morning

and beneath the skewed abandoned
cross of a telephone pole
a woman with a tin scuttle

gathering coal that had fallen from the trains
dried clots of earth's blood.

II

Afternoon at my father's house
sun filling empty flower pots by the coal shed

watching the holly-hocks the roses and mimosa
recalling one of my grandfather's sermons:

how the souls will one day set out
to find their new bodies

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how they will leave behind this hollow earth
swirling with ice and rags

I imagine them rising above the blistering corn
above the dust of the dry rows the chaff settling

and all they can see from the air
is the smallest thing: a piece of straw

caught in the planks of the barn door
a black wasp clinging to the kitchen screen.

III

Awake that night in the spare room
which once was mine

streetlamp through the curtains
lit sparkler of moths
radio from an upstairs window

fear of nakedness of insignificance
the corridors of my narrow life

the viewing room was carpeted and modern

counting sadly backward to myself.

IV

Moon in the spines of the hawthorn
clouds amethyst and omniscient
hands of the clock again moving
toward morning and I picture headlights
tracing through the cemetery as through a maze:

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when our souls lie waiting in their beds
our bodies
awaiting the end of baptism by earth

and we picture somewhere above us
the house we were born in
can see the hydrangeas and impatiens by the steps
a crown of gnats hovering above the four o'clocks
a red bee bowing into one of the yellow blossoms
and through an open window a lamp
curtains reaching up into the room

what peace will lift us
whispering what hope
who want only to rise to the surface
as through water

what peace when we want to return
not set out
when we want only to step up onto that windy porch
to step back through that fiery door?

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Dana Gioia

Becoming a Redwood

Stand in a field long enough, and the sounds
start up again. The crickets, the invisible
toad who claims that change is possible,

And all the other life too small to name.
First one, then another, until innumerable
they merge into the single voice of a summer hill.

Yes, it's hard to stand still, hour after hour,
fixed as a fencepost, hearing the steers
snort in the dark pasture, smelling the manure.

And paralyzed by the mystery of how a stone
can bear to be a stone, the pain
the grass endures breaking through the earth's crust.

Unimaginable the redwoods on the far hill,
rooted for centuries, the living wood grown tall
and thickened with a hundred thousand days of light.

The old windmill creaks in perfect time
to the wind shaking the miles of pasture grass,
and the last farmhouse light goes off.

Something moves nearby. Coyotes hunt
these hills and packs of feral dogs.
But standing here at night accepts all that.

You are your own pale shadow in the quarter moon,
moving more slowly than the crippled stars,
part of the moonlight as the moonlight falls,

Part of the grass that answers the wind,
part of the midnight's watchfulness that knows
there is no silence but when danger comes.

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Two Poems by Milan Richter

Spoiled Poem

You spoiled something back there at the beginning,
a vowel, a syllable, a word,
and the poem's inedible now,
like strawberry jam
capped with mold.

Someone spoiled something back there at the
beginning,
the Lord, the twenty-fourth pair of chromosomes,
and the poem's buried now
like a *tallith*
in a mass grave.

You spoiled something back there at the beginning,
married, got divorced,
and the poem's torn away now
like a son from the father,
the father from a son.

Someone spoiled you back there at the beginning,
forgot to give you sharp elbows, a dull conscience,
and the poem's in trouble now,
like a fool
who told the king the truth.

The poem is spoiled,
something's missing,
too late to set it straight,
like your life, your ancestors, like history:
it's what it is.

A strawberry in spoiled sugar.

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Roots in the Air

In the air, that's where your roots are,
over there, in the air.

—Paul Celan

—Where to, Doctor? Cemetery?
—Yes, my friend, making my grave rounds. Our
mother's there,
my brother too, and the wife's niece, buried last year,
only seventeen, leukemia, it seems. And you, sir?
—Home. The days are getting shorter,
I like to stay home now.
—You've visited your graves already?
—I have no graves. My wife deserted me a long time
ago,
you know, my sons are alive, but far away,
in Canada, yes, Canada. . . . I have no graves. . . .
—But what about your mother, your father, brothers,
grandparents, where are they buried?
—Over there, in the air over Auschwitz,
they're buried in the air.

—translated from the Slovak
by Jascha Kessler with the author

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James Laughlin

Lines to be put into Latin

The lightest touch
if it is gently giv-

en can yield as much
affection as a deep

embrace soft as a
glance swift as a

drop of rain light
as a leaf I give

you these again.

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L'Esprit de L'Escalier

Lily Tuck

In the photograph, my mouth is slightly open. I am talking to the man sitting next to me. The man is the writer, Alberto Moravia. Next to him, there is a woman. She is smiling at the camera, I can't think of her name. The other person in the photograph is Massimo. Massimo is looking off, looking away somewhere, looking elsewhere. This means that Massimo's face is seen in profile—you cannot see how good-looking he is. He is so good-looking, in fact, that Alberto Moravia said that he had made one of the characters in his book look just like Massimo, only this same character, Alberto Moravia also said, had met a bad end.

Moravia gave me this book of his to read, but I left it in the car on the way home to Rome from Fregene. Fregene was where the photograph was taken. Fregene was where we had lunch the day I had to get into the car and drive back to Rome with Alberto Moravia instead of with Massimo.

His car, I remember, was custom built, special—something to do with the pedal you depressed to disengage the clutch. Alberto Moravia, you see, had a bad leg. He

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could not reach and push down on the clutch properly. The way Alberto Moravia drove was also, you might say, special. He drove very fast with one hand on my leg—high up on my leg.

When finally I arrived home, my father said he had been waiting for me. He wanted to know where I had been. "The beach," I said. "I was at the beach with Massimo." My father said, "No, no, Massimo has been killed."

I could hear my father snore every night that summer. Loud shuddering snores. Sometimes, the snores would wake him. Then my father would make another sound. A peevish sound. A sound of distress, also.

Most nights, I did not get home until three or four in the morning. One time, I did not get home until seven o'clock in the morning. It was light already and I could hear my father in the bathroom. The door to my room was shut and I just made it inside when the toilet flushed.

My boyfriend lived in Trastevere. I don't have a photograph of him but if I think of him, of us, I think of us eating spaghetti at a trattoria that stayed open all night that was right around the corner from where he lived. I remember I liked that part the best of everything, better than the making love—the eating spaghetti part. I liked sitting at the tables, the tablecloths stained with old tomato sauce, and I liked sitting next to him, our shoulders touching, and playing with the bread crumbs while we waited for the food to arrive. I liked sitting under the harsh unflattering late-night lights, the men who were there starting their day looking at me. Their look seemed to say that they knew we had just gotten through making love, which was the reason we were so hungry.

My father's office was on the fifth floor and the elevator was so old, to run it you still had to put a coin in it. The coin too, was hard to find, a ten lire piece that nearly no longer existed. My father had to go all the way to a bank on the Piazza di Spagna to buy the ten lire pieces he

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needed to use the elevator. But the elevator was how I met Massimo. Massimo was an architect and his office was right across the hall from my father's.

You could tell right away by the way Massimo said his Rs that Massimo was not from Rome. Massimo was from the North, from Turin. Massimo knew a lot of people. He knew people like Silvana Mangano and like Lucia Bosé who married the bullfighter Dominguín, he knew Vittorio De Sica and Vittorio Gassman. Massimo even said he knew Anna Magnani. Massimo said he had had dinner with Anna Magnani once, and to prove it, Massimo said Anna Magnani spoke with her mouth full.

I don't remember how Massimo said he got to know Alberto Moravia or why Moravia asked Massimo to have lunch with him or, in turn, why Massimo asked me to go with him, but the one thing I do remember was how, in those days, Rome was like a small town. Everyone knew everyone and everyone knew what everyone was doing and whom he was sleeping with, and you always ran into someone somewhere—at one of the two or three good restaurants the tourists did not know about yet or at the outdoor nightclub off the Via Cassia where, at the very last possible moment, the stripper in the show turned out to be a man.

Massimo said that Moravia had also said not to forget to bring his bathing suit. The house, Moravia said, was next to the beach and Massimo, if he wanted to, could go swimming before lunch. In the car, on the way to Fregene, Massimo said he just remembered he had forgotten to bring his. But anyway, the day was hazy and overcast, he said. I told Massimo I would not go in the water alone, by myself. I would only go in if there was someone else. Or, if Massimo borrowed a bathing suit. I said to Massimo, too, then, that there was an undertow.

There was a lot of traffic that day and when Massimo and I arrived at Alberto Moravia's house we were late.

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Moravia said, "Hurry up, if you want to go in swimming. We're waiting for you to eat lunch." And Massimo—I'll never forget this—said, "No, no. I don't want to go in swimming, she does."

They watched me. I saw Alberto Moravia, Massimo, and the woman who was smiling in the photograph standing on the porch of the house holding bright red drinks watch me walk across the beach to the sea. A gray choppy sea, an end-of-the-summer sea, and I remember thinking: If I drown now it will be Massimo's fault. I also remember hearing Alberto Moravia say something about Americans—something about how only Americans would swim on a day like this. Americans, Moravia said, always had to prove things. But I did not look back at them. I put down my towel and I adjusted the straps on my bathing suit and I ran into the sea.

Massimo, as it turned out, also knew the woman who was smiling in the photograph. Massimo said she was a friend of his ex-wife, Ivy. Massimo had been married to Ivy for exactly four months. Instead of getting a divorce, he said, the marriage, thank God, had been annulled. Ivy was a model, but Ivy, Massimo said, wanted to be an actress—she wanted to be discovered—and the only trouble with Ivy was that Ivy could only talk about shoes, about clothes. But he still saw her—Ivy. Massimo said he saw Ivy at those cafés on the Via Veneto, the Café de Paris and the other one across the street from it, the one next to the Hotel Excelsior. As a matter of fact, the last time he saw Ivy, Massimo said, was on the same day he had seen Vittorio Gassman and Massimo said he had told Ivy then how she had just missed him.

But to go back—back to the day Massimo's Lancia on the way back to Rome got a blow-out and Massimo lost control of the car, the same day we had lunch with Alberto Moravia, the day I went in swimming, the day Alberto Moravia took the photograph with the camera

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he had showed us. The camera, Moravia said, had a special feature. If you set it, you would then have ten seconds to run back to your chair and to where you were sitting, which was exactly what Alberto Moravia did. He ran back with his bad leg and he bumped into the table and the wine glasses jiggled and some of my wine spilt.

But earlier and, as I was starting to say, when I came out of the water from swimming, everyone had left, everyone had gone back inside the house already. Alberto Moravia, Massimo, the woman who was smiling, all of them were sitting around the dining room table eating as if they had forgotten about me completely. They were eating the antipasto and Moravia, without looking up at me, said, "Sit down, sit here," and I said to Massimo, "But I'm in my wet bathing suit still."

The woman who was smiling in the photograph stood up and took me into a bedroom—Alberto Moravia's bedroom. There, I took off my wet bathing suit and as I was standing with one foot in the air about to step into my underpants the door opened and Moravia walked in. Alberto Moravia said he just wanted to look for a book—his book, the same book he gave to me.

When I was dressed again and when I went back to the dining room, they were all twirling spaghetti on their forks—the second course. Moravia looked up at me and laughed. "You're a natural blond, after all," he said. I looked over at Massimo but Massimo's face was bent over his plate. For a moment, I wasn't even sure I knew what Moravia was talking about and it was not until much later and until I was back in Rome that I thought of saying to him: No, you're wrong. I dye it blond.

There is a phrase for this, a French idiom exactly for when you only think of something to say afterwards, after the event, for the apt phrase, for the perfect answer, but too late—*l'esprit de l'escalier.* As for what happened after lunch when Alberto Moravia told Massimo that Massimo should drive the woman who was smiling in the photo-

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graph back to Rome, and he, Alberto Moravia, would drive me in, and I wanted to say something—I wanted to object to this—this was not the same thing. For no matter how long or how hard I racked my brain for what to say to him—to this day even—I, for one, could never have come up with the right answer and I don't know if there is an expression for this.

In the car, with Moravia, I remember how, under my breath, I cursed Massimo. Massimo, I thought, should have stepped in. Massimo should have said something to Moravia like: No, I brought her here, and, you see, I know her father. Her father and I work on the same floor of the same office building. I promised to get her back safe and sound to him.

Also, on the way back to Rome from Fregene, I was thinking of how, the next time I saw him, I would not mince words with Massimo and of how, among other things, I would say to him: Not only was Alberto Moravia driving his custom-built car with the special clutch you depressed at a hundred miles an hour, and the whole time he had his hand on my leg, and I don't care how famous he is or that I can tell people later that I met him, I could have been killed. But also, I went in swimming, and it is a miracle that I did not drown and that I did not get pulled out to sea by the undertow, either.

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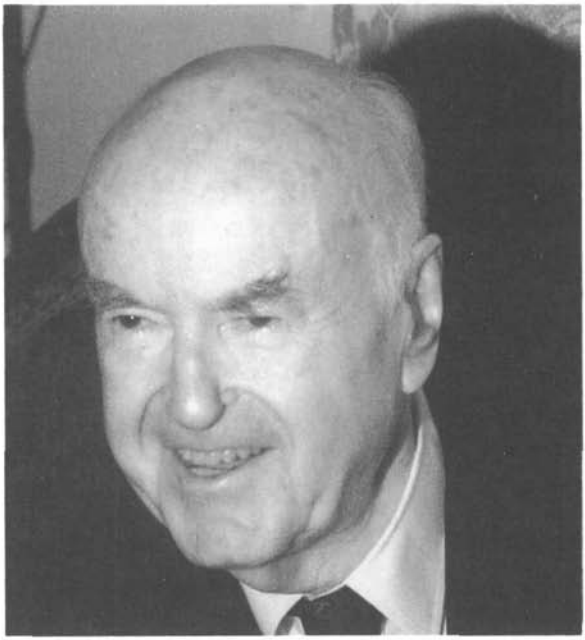
Buontalenti + Vasari built this rectangular room for him communicating with his private apartments. For the allegories of water & painting depict pearl fishing, but Kunckel for cambayais, the origin of coral + amber, the passage of the Red Sea, the working of wool: on the opposite wall under Fire, (some of its chief operations) the invention of gunpowder, a cannon foundry, a glass works, the laboratory of a herbalist + a goldsmith, + the bake of Pozzuoli under Air a cave of diamonds; under earth a goldmine. In 8 niches bronze statuettes of Pluto, Juno, Vulcan, Apollo Aeolus, Ops, Amphitrite + Venus. Mythical subjects adorn the cupboard doors with bronze effigies in niches, mythical historical episodes + realistic objects. Consistent with these inside the cupboard + corresponding with the paintings + bronzes on the upper row is their work made by fire of iron, steel + glass. Were placed under the statues of Vulcan + the element of fire, medals, works in gold, rubies + minerals etc. under Pluto + Ops + the element of Earth. Here the jewels of Juno + crystal, under Neptune, pearls under Venus + so forth. In days all the paintings were in place on the cupboard doors. But when the Medici left the Palazzo Vecchio, his study was abandoned, the specimens + bronzes were dispersed + the restored in the present century (1930). It is a tantalising illustration of the Florentine taste inspired by late 16th century scholars + painters: while Vulcan at his Forge is obvious, many an hour to guess for us who are less learned what allegorically minded mythology + Mannerism is triumphant in the G.D. Francesco's sumptuous little study, a secret storeroom of the artist's natural treasures in collection. Fantastic tradition Cultural



Harold Acton

Recollections of an Aesthete

No pilgrimage to Florence is complete without a visit to La Pietra, the splendid Renaissance home of author and historian Sir Harold Acton. It stands at the end of a long avenue of cypresses bordering olive groves, its honey-colored walls glowing in the sun.

An elderly retainer led me through cool shuttered halls to the drawing room where Acton greeted me with a firm handshake and a gentle bow. He is tall and vigorous, with a youthful twinkle in his eyes, and he speaks as he writes—a clear melodious English heightened by dramatic inflections and seasoned

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with Italian expressions. His charm, courtly manners and famous hospitality are redolent of an era of which he is one of the last survivors.

Acton was born in 1904, and educated at Eton and Oxford, where he read French. After university he lived in Paris for a couple of years, and in 1932 went to China to become Professor of English Literature at the University of Peking. He learned Mandarin Chinese and translated modern Mandarin poetry and plays into English. Two volumes of his translations were published in England to great acclaim. When the war broke out he returned to Britain and joined the RAF. After the war he settled at La Pietra in Florence to write. Over the following decades he produced a variety of highly praised historical and scholarly books: The Last Medici, The Bourbons of Naples, Tuscan Villas, *and the two-volume book* Memoirs of an Aesthete, *still considered one of the most popular postwar autobiographies. He was knighted in 1965 for his services to the arts.*

Acton's American mother and British father were both avid collectors, and La Pietra contains their rich and varied collection of paintings, sculptures, tapestries and objets d'art from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, to which he has added a few of his own acquisitions, notably from China. His memory is prodigious: he knows the names, dates and provenance of thousands of works of art, as well as incidents and anecdotes relating to his own past. He kindly took me for a stroll through the gardens—green acres divided by hedges, rose gardens, arches and columns, with the city of Florence shimmering in the distance. Two hundred statues, collected from northern Italy by his father are scattered amid centenarian trees, and there is an open-air theater—two levels of grass bordered with hedges—where during the First World War Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, stranded in Florence, gave a performance. Throughout his long and fruitful life Sir Harold Acton has known some of the most remarkable men and women of his time, and he speaks about them with perceptive affection.

The following interview took place at La Pietra on two occasions in December 1988.

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INTERVIEWER

Would you say that you are the last of a long line of English Romantics, starting with Byron and Shelley, who came to Florence, fell in love with it and stayed to write?

HAROLD ACTON

Except that I was born here, in this house. The Actons came originally from Shropshire. They were Catholics and fled with King James II, and settled first in Tuscany, and later in Naples. Queen Maria Carolina of Naples wanted to rebuild her navy and her brother, the grand duke of Tuscany, recommended John Acton, already in his service. I think the Queen fell in love with him, because he had such a personal success. He was evidently very able, and became Naples's prime minister. When he was sixty he sought dispensation from the pope to marry his fourteen-year-old niece, but I don't know about this colorful character, as I am not addicted to family history. I am a selfish bachelor entirely devoted to the arts.

INTERVIEWER

It seems that the Actons never lost their roots in England, and your grandfather went back to settle down in his country of origin. But your father returned to Italy. How did that happen?

ACTON

He was a gifted painter and very clever. He had an instinct for objects that very few cared for at that period. For instance he collected primitive thirteenth- and fourteenth-century paintings when others were keen on seventeenth century. In those days all the art historians who lived in Florence did a little dealing on the side. They bought bargains and sold them at a profit to keep the pot boiling. You have no idea how cheap things were in those days; Florence had a huge English community, because they could live here more comfortably on small incomes, which they couldn't do in England. My mother

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came from a banking family in Chicago, and my parents bought this property, which has five other houses besides this villa, where I was born in 1904. With the advent of fascism most of the English departed, and now there are others who have bought country houses in the Tuscan hills around Florence. They come for holidays, and some of them don't even speak Italian.

INTERVIEWER

Your father kept the English tradition of sending you away to boarding school in England. Where did you go?

ACTON

I first went to Wixenford, a prep school in Berkshire which no longer exists, then to Château de Lancy near Geneva. I owe a great deal to the fact that I could read Racine as a child, and later Rimbaud, Verlaine and other French poets. Then at thirteen I went to Eton. It was a period of many talents: David Cecil at Eton and Kenneth Clark at Wixenford—one of the few art historians who wrote well. We had some good musicians too, such as Eddy Sackville-West (a cousin of Vita's) who became the lord of Knole. He wrote several novels—not readable I'm afraid.

INTERVIEWER

You wrote and published poetry very early on. When did you start?

ACTON

Living in Italy you are drawn to poetry, are you not? The language is naturally poetical, and we were surrounded by poets. My mother used to take me to the Comtesse d'Orsay's salon, where D'Annunzio often recited his poems. It was very inspiring for a boy of ten to hear this lovely voice reciting melodious verse, and I wanted to be a poet. D'Annunzio's are still among the best modern Italian poems. Then there was the move-

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ment of the *futuristi*—Marinetti, Balla, De Chirico and lots of others. Florence was then more the capital of art than it is now. At Eton a friend of mine, Brian Howard, edited a magazine, *The Eton Candle,* and published a number of my early poems. I even had a poem in *The Spectator;* I remember receiving a few shillings for it and being thrilled. After Eton I went to Christ Church, Oxford, which is a very beautiful college as you know, and very inspiring. So I became known as a poet and published several volumes: *Aquarium, An Indian Ass,* etc. . . . I think five in all. They are out of print, of course, but quite an important chapter of my life. But they are rather dated I'm afraid, and I'm not proud of them. Although I no longer write verse I continue to be a poet, insofar as my vision of history, art, literature is, I can say candidly, poetical.

INTERVIEWER

What made you give up poetry in favor of novels?

ACTON

I suppose competition. All my friends were writing novels, which were easier to publish, if not more profitable. The first novel I wrote was called *Humdrum.* Critics were kinder then—but *Humdrum* is best forgotten.

INTERVIEWER

You were very popular at Oxford—you were exotic and stylish and flamboyant—and you made a number of life-long friends, notably Evelyn Waugh who is supposed to have portrayed you in *Brideshead Revisited.* Is Anthony Blanche in that novel really you?

ACTON

It is a caricature, more based on Brian Howard than me. But it was my room he depicted as Sebastian Flyte's, with a harmonium and an elephant's foot and so on. And I did read poems from my balcony in Meadow Buildings.

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Once I recited the whole of *The Waste Land* through a megaphone at a League of Nations garden party. *The Oxford Magazine* launched an attack: "This awful rubbish read by this affected aesthete," and groups of elderly women stalked out in protest. One of them was a descendent of Wordsworth, I was told. But everyone suggests something to a novelist, and his whole métier is to borrow traits from characters he knows and make concoctions, is it not?

INTERVIEWER

In Persian they say "beware the poet's satire—it lasts longer than his praise." It seems that your reputation was impaired by that episode and the general belief that Anthony Blanche was you, until you wrote your *Memoirs.* Is that so?

ACTON

My publishers suggested that since I had had a varied life I should write an autobiography, which I did. When Evelyn Waugh heard about it he said: "Good-bye, this is the last time we shall speak!" He thought I was going to say something offensive. But I laughed it off, and our friendship survived till the end. Poor Evelyn! He was witty, charming, original, but he could be disagreeable on certain occasions. Still, he was a fine writer; his command of the English language is very rare indeed. Everything is in the right place, the right order, and memorable sentences one can quote. He is superior to his reputation, which rests largely on the lighter works, such as *Vile Bodies* and *Scoop.* His *War Trilogy* is a masterpiece which will endure. It is one of the best works on the war, and recreates the atmosphere of those days.

INTERVIEWER

I think people love *Brideshead Revisited* because it is autobiographical, nostalgic and very poetic.

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ACTON

Evelyn was an accomplished artist. His early writings were quite poetic. I published one of his early short stories in *The Oxford Broom* which I edited. It was called "The Man Who Sought for What He Lost"—I *think* that was the title. In English literature he loved Bunyan of all people, because of his powerful poetic imagery. *Brideshead* was based on the Lygon family. Evelyn was in love with one of the Lygon sisters and fascinated by Lord Beauchamp, the head of the family. Lord Beauchamp had eight children, but he was ambidextrous and got into hot water on that account. In those days people didn't wear labels; it is astonishing how nowadays they flaunt their depravities. These things should be kept private.

INTERVIEWER

What was Graham Greene like in those days? He too started life as a poet?

ACTON

Our friendship started with a rumpus. I published an unkind review of his first book of verse called *Babbling April.* I couldn't help it; I thought it embarrassingly banal. Doubtless he is now ashamed of it, as we all are ashamed of our early explosions in print. But Oxford is a binding influence, and he eventually forgave me and we became good friends. As a Catholic I warmed to his conversion to Catholicism, as did Evelyn Waugh who was also a convert, though with a different temperament. Later on Graham Greene came and lived in Capri, and the Italians loved him, although he was so very English. He had an enchanting American girlfriend who lived half the year with him and the other half with her husband in Cambridge. I think their love affair came to an end after an airplane accident in which she broke all her bones.

INTERVIEWER

So much for love! But how do you like his novels?

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ACTON

I think Greene was a first class writer, and I'm surprised that he never won the Nobel Prize. Now they have given it to some Egyptian we have never even heard of!

INTERVIEWER

Is that not to their credit? Literature has become too Anglocentric, and if once in a while a writer from the third world is brought to the attention of the world who can begrudge it?

ACTON

Perhaps you are right, in that respect. There are some Italian writers who deserve international recognition. For example Sciascia, who writes most beautifully about his native Sicily. Or Lampedusa who wrote one of the best novels of the century, *The Leopard.* Some of his short stories were published after his death, and they are equally subtle. He is a real master of language. I never knew him, as he hardly ever ventured out of Sicily. His wife was a Baltic baroness, and a psychoanalyst. Now if there is a country that least needs psychoanalysis it is Sicily! But his marriage was apparently harmonious.

INTERVIEWER

Going back to your Oxford days: there were other poets at the time, who became famous later, like Cecil Day-Lewis, Auden, Spender . . .

ACTON

Day-Lewis was very good looking, but not a very good poet. In fact, I don't care very much for those thirties poets. Except Auden, whom I used to see, especially when he was living in Ischia. I think some of his poetry is splendid, but he is not as great as his reputation. Louis MacNeice was more musical—he had the Irish melody in him. But I am not a fan of modern poetry, so perhaps I shouldn't judge.

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INTERVIEWER

Yet you admire Eliot, who started it all. Did you ever meet him?

ACTON

Oh I have a profound respect for Eliot. He launched modernism in English poetry, but he borrowed a lot from the French: Mallarmé, Milosz, and above all Apollinaire. They are all indebted to Apollinaire—Pound, Eliot, every one. I used to see Eliot at Edith Sitwell's flat. She lived in a gloomy building in the Moscow Road, and Eliot came there for tea and a bun. She edited an anthology called *Wheels,* and many writers who became famous later were first published there, as well as others who are now forgotten. *Wheels* was very influential and avant-garde. Otherwise there was Georgian poetry, which was dull and strangely popular. Now one can't even remember the names of those versifiers. I simply can't. Anyway, Eliot was very courteous and rather stiff—a cold fish. He had no social charm, but he was a great poet.

INTERVIEWER

You liked Edith Sitwell's poetry, which was considered ultra-modern, didn't you?

ACTON

Some of her poetry was nonsense, but so was Edward Lear's. She was the first to recite her poems through a megaphone. I remember the first performance of *Façade,* with music by William Walton, which was highly enjoyable. I became a friend of all the three Sitwells, Edith, Sache and Osbert. They were semi-Florentine and owned the castle of Montegufoni, on the way to Siena. It was a magnificent house—eventually Osbert lived and died there and the others came for holidays.

INTERVIEWER

There was the Sitwell coterie and the Bloomsbury set, and sometimes they overlapped; I mean some writers, like Aldous Huxley, frequented both groups. Did you?

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ACTON

The queen of Bloomsbury was Virginia Woolf. But she and Edith Sitwell did not like each other—they were so different. Arthur Waley lived in Gordon Square and belonged to the Bloomsburys, and he was one of my best friends. It was with him that I met Virginia and Leonard Woolf and their entourage. They were all rather intermarried and having love affairs with each other, and it seemed very inbred to me.

INTERVIEWER

Coming from a cosmopolitan milieu, did you find Bloomsbury clique-ish and insular?

ACTON

I thought it was provincial. Here the city is small but the society is international. Art scholars from every nationality lived here: German, Austrian, French, American. At the center of the art world was Bernard Berenson, who was a paternal friend and guide. People came from all over the world to his villa, I Tati, to work, study and listen to the Master.

INTERVIEWER

Among Berenson's close friends was Edith Wharton, who I believe stayed with him for long periods. Did you ever meet her?

ACTON

Frequently. To meet she was a typical New England matron of mature age, who lived in Paris and wore elegant Parisian gowns. She never looked as if she enjoyed life, and wore a permanently discontented expression. In most of her books there is a miasma of unhappiness, although on the material side she had plenty of luxuries. Berenson was devoted to her, although she was rather stiff and standoffish. She would ask: Who is that creature? American? Where does he come from? And if you said

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from Illinois, she refused to meet him. She was snobbish with a capital S and wanted to be informed about people's antecedents, as if that had anything to do with their true worth. But as a writer she was masterly, and I'm glad she is enjoying a new vogue—she certainly deserves it.

INTERVIEWER

In that between-the-wars period you met a number of other writers who came here: D.H. Lawrence for example . . .

ACTON

Oh he was *crude! Cruuude!* Everything had a double meaning and was rooted in sex. But he was a vivid writer, and he had a prophetic air about him, you felt his words were pearls. His wife Frieda was fat and florid, bossy and *intense*—with a capital I. They were a portentous couple.

INTERVIEWER

You also met Violet Trefusis, Vita Sackville-West's and Virginia Woolf's friend. You didn't like her, but although you never wrote anything bad about her, in one of your books you put a photograph of her with her French maid in which the maid is elegant and well-groomed while Violet is frumpish and plain.

ACTON

Wasn't that well chosen? She was a monster! I shunned her! She had many devoted friends despite her malice, and she was malicious. By contrast, her mother, Mrs. Keppel, was an absolute angel, genial and generous. King Edward VII fell in love with her when he was already aged, so I don't think he had much bedwork.

INTERVIEWER

After Oxford you went to live in Paris. Why?

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ACTON

I was always drawn to French culture. Even now if I didn't live in Florence I would want to live in Paris. I had an apartment on the quai Bourbon, on L'Isle St. Louis, round the corner from my friend Nancy Cunard. She was then running the *Hours Press,* which published a variety of excellent writing, both English and French. She was having an affair with Louis Aragon, who nearly committed suicide over her, but she was a coldhearted Circe, very promiscuous. Her strange, individual beauty was well-photographed by Man Ray, and painted by Wyndham Lewis among others. She did not keep a salon, instead went to cafés and drank rather heavily, and the surrealists gathered round her. I met many writers with her: Eluard, Soupault, etc. . . . Gertrude Stein, on the other hand, dominated a salon in rue Christine, which was crammed with wonderful pictures by Picasso, Matisse, etc. . . . She had bought them long before they were famous or had become personal friends. I used to visit her often and she took me to Picasso's studio, over the quai d'Orléans, where I met Tzara and Cocteau. I also met Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson at her salon. Gertrude Stein was not fond of Hemingway—he was too proud of his virility, which truly masculine men are not. You might say he had too much hair on his chest.

INTERVIEWER

Diana and Duff Cooper were at the British Embassy just after the war, and they had a salon too, didn't they?

ACTON

They did. And they had the good sense to mingle the French and English despite their political differences. Some of the French hated each other passionately: the Gaullists loathed those who had stayed in France under German occupation, and the Leftists hated the Gaullists, and so on. But at the British Embassy they buried their hatchets. Diana made a pet of Christian Bérard, the ballet

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designer, who was invariably there. He had a grotesque appearance—tubby, bearded and highly scented, because, I think, he seldom bathed. Cocteau was often there too. At the time his protégé was Jean Genet. With his cropped hair and crushed nose Genet looked like a tough jailbird, more a seventeenth-century poet than a cherubic Rimbaud. But he was classical in his literary taste, and wrote an elegant, rather precious French. I remember meeting him with Cocteau and buying his books on the spot while he looked on.

INTERVIEWER

In 1932 you went to Peking, which considering your enviable set-up in Paris and Florence was a drastic measure. Why did you decide to go so far?

ACTON

I had always been in love with Chinese art and got to know Chinese poetry through Arthur Waley, who was a genius at translating and interpreting it, and who was a close friend of mine.

INTERVIEWER

He was to Chinese poetry what Fitzgerald was to Omar Khayyam, wouldn't you say so?

ACTON

Indeed. I think he is the best, though some people prefer Professor Giles because his translations rhyme. Chinese poetry has both external and internal rhyming, which makes it difficult as well as pointless to try and bend to English rhyme. I think Giles's translations sound like jingles or Christmas crackers, while Waley's are genuine poetry. Anyway, I was invited by a dean at the University of Peking, who was a friend of mine, to take the Chair of English Literature from the previous incumbent. So off I went, stayed seven years, and adored it.

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INTERVIEWER

Did you learn Mandarin before you went?

ACTON

No, I learnt it on the spot, which is much the best way, don't you know, and the Chinese are natural teachers—patient and calm. I learned colloquial Mandarin, but how could I keep it up in Florence? I lived in a handsome house with four courtyards belonging to a delightful Prince who was related to the last Emperor, P'u-yi. I loved the Chinese people; they are instinctively polite; courtesy and culture is bred in the bone—or was then. But oh dear! I have no desire to return. Terrible things happened during the so-called Cultural Revolution, which was anti-culture. Many of my friends perished. I try not to think of it; what good does it do?

INTERVIEWER

You translated modern Chinese poetry and published two volumes. Did Arthur Waley help you?

ACTON

No, but he approved of them. His field was ancient Chinese poetry, first or second century, Chou, Tang, that period. Mine was modern, and I was helped by one of my students. The poems were among the best then produced in China; whether they are read today I don't know. The two volumes were called *Modern Chinese Poetry,* published in 1936, and *Famous Chinese Plays,* 1937.

INTERVIEWER

You once told me that you left the house and all its contents—your collection of Chinese objets d'art—behind when you returned to England at the outbreak of the war. Did you intend to go back afterwards and continue living there?

ACTON

Oh yes. I thought the war would be short, and that my duty as an Englishman was to return and fight. We were

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up against something evil: the triumph of Hitler would be the end of civilization. I joined the RAF hoping that I would be sent to China where my knowledge of the language and the people might be useful. But I found a reference to myself as persona non grata who should on no account be allowed to go to China! It was the Anthony Blanche smear that had provoked such an assessment, because my own life was remarkably unsensational. Anyway, an American friend of mine was director of the Kansas City Museum, which has a magnificent collection of Chinese artifacts, and he managed to save some of my best pieces. He took them back to the States, and they are now exhibited at the museum. If ever you go to America you must go and see them: a huge Tang dynasty horse, creamy white and glazed, several scrolls, some more recent paintings by Pin Hsian Yu and Chi Pai-Shih. . . . Thank God they are well looked after.

INTERVIEWER

Apparently it was easy in those days to buy Ming vases for a few dollars . . .

ACTON

Occasionally. The Ming tombs were infested with bandits. A group of them once joined us on a picnic, and devoured our foie gras and champagne from the Hôtel de Pékin; poor things, they couldn't have been more agreeable.

INTERVIEWER

Did you study Chinese philosophy as well, I mean Buddhism, and Confucianism?

ACTON

I was fascinated by Buddhism, and used to visit Buddhist temples and attend ceremonies. It was still prevalent and had a benign influence on people's lives. Confucius was more concerned with morality; he did not found a religion.

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INTERVIEWER

What happened here in your absence?

ACTON

My parents were briefly imprisoned and had a horrible time. My mother was dressed for a party when they came to arrest her, and she refused to change her clothes. Eventually they got out and spent the rest of the war in Switzerland. The house was occupied first by German and then Allied officers. The Germans behaved better than the Allies, I'm sorry to say. Some things did vanish, which I suppose is inevitable, but on the whole the collection survived. The Germans were well organized, and at first they did not go in for wanton destruction. Only when they were harassed in the south of Italy did they go on the rampage. My brother William died on active service. He was two years younger than I, a gifted artist, and I think my parents' favorite. He had stayed with them while I had gone to China, which perhaps denoted a filial detachment. In fact, I had left because I could not stand fascism. People imagine that Italy could not really have been a Fascist country, but it was then, completely. Many who deny it now and claim to be communists, were blatant Fascists in those days. There were slogans everywhere—*Evviva il Duce, Duce . . .* My parents were devastated by my brother's death, and when my father died I came back here to live with my mother, whom I worshipped, and to write.

INTERVIEWER

There followed two decades of productivity: *Memoirs of an Aesthete, The Bourbons of Naples,* etc. . . . Your *Memoirs* defy convention by disregarding the popular connotations of the word "aesthete." Were you being provocative?

ACTON

No. An aesthete means a lover of art, which is what I

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have always been. Art is eternal; it is what makes you feel life is worth living. I was bred on beauty and have mercifully been surrounded by it. I'm tormented by ugliness, such as certain examples of modern architecture. That is why I admire Prince Charles so much—he speaks for all of us when he deplores those modern structures which are eyesores. England is full of fine buildings, but some of the things architects foist on us nowadays are intolerable. To live with ugly things is degrading, and it affects the whole spirit. One reason why I loved Peking was the beauty of its architecture—absolutely harmonious. My own house, as I said, had four courtyards and a garden behind, with fantastic rocks and trees, lovely!

INTERVIEWER

After the success of your *Memoirs,* you published two volumes of short stories: *Tit for Tat* and *The Soul's Gymnasium.* Was there any particular reason why you returned to fiction with this particular genre?

ACTON

As Flaubert showed us, you can bring a situation to life in a few pages more clearly than in a hundred or even a thousand. There are a few long novels which are great—say *War and Peace*—but on the whole the novel is a less artistic form than the short story. I have been rereading Maupassant, Mérimée and, of course, Chekhov who is the greatest exponent of the genre. The Russians have a supreme gift for the short story, but many of their novels are too long—I'm thinking of Dostoyevski, for example. I suppose it is like a warm bath; once you have got into it you want to stay forever, adding more and more hot water!

INTERVIEWER

John Lehmann published some very good short stories

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in his literary magazine *New Writing,* during the war. Did you write for him?

ACTON

Yes, I did. Quite a few writers produced short stories owing to his active encouragement. He published some essays of mine on Chinese literature. He was a delightful person, thoroughly European.

INTERVIEWER

Another man you knew among the art historians who came here was Anthony Blunt, the spy. Did you meet any of the other spies belonging to his ring?

ACTON

Blunt was on the Board of Governors of the British Institute in Florence, and I used to see him at our meetings, as I have been on that board since the war. He seemed a very cold fish, without human warmth or humor. But he was an able art historian, highly cultured. What he has written on southern Italian art is particularly perceptive, and he wrote in praise of Poussin and made him appreciated in England when nobody else was doing so. The Queen happened to like him, which seems surprising. I also met that rascally spy—what was his name? Oh yes, Guy Burgess. He was a crony of Harold Nicolson's. Nicolson had a flat in Albany, Piccadilly, and whenever I went to see him, Burgess was there—tipsy, unkempt and repulsive. He did not give the impression of someone under self-control.

INTERVIEWER

I would like to talk about your literary influences. You told me about the Italian poets, but what about English writers who first kindled the love of literature in you?

ACTON

At school I first read the English poets who had lived

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in Italy: Shelley, Byron, Savage Landon, etc. . . . I still consider Shelley a magical poet. Byron is more rhetorical, but I don't think there is much depth in *Childe Harold.* He had a great feeling for Italy, perhaps because he was fortunate to find a beautiful woman, Teresa Guiccioli, who loved him. He seems to have behaved kindly to her—for a change!

INTERVIEWER

What about teachers? Was there one in particular who guided you?

ACTON

Aldous Huxley was a master at Eton when I was there. He had come straight from Oxford, and Spottiswood, the local bookshop, displayed his first books, and we were very impressed. He also came and lived in Florence. I liked his poetry, and found his novels and short stories brilliant. I don't expect I would care for them now, but he was witty and entertaining. His poem "Leda" made a great impression on young people, as I recall.

INTERVIEWER

At Oxford, reading French literature, were you guided by anyone in particular? Who were your favorite authors?

ACTON

I read the classics, of course, but at that age one was also moved by early Romantics, for example Alfred de Musset's *Les Nuits: "Poète prends ton luth et me donne un baiser . . . Le printemps nait ce soir . . ."* Later I read Rimbaud, Verlaine, and to a lesser extent Baudelaire. But I didn't do much work at Oxford—I was more absorbed in my own writing and was rather too productive, as I have already said. Among the dons, I was devoted

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to J.D. Beasley, still the greatest authority on Greek vases. I once went with him and his wife to Spain, looking for Greek vases in Madrid. Then there were contemporary French poets who came to Oxford. I can't remember their names now, but most of all I admired Cocteau. He was a series of surprises; you never knew what he was going to do next, pictures, films, poems, novels—and when you are young you want surprises. I still do. He was very Gallic and belonged to a limited social milieu, but he was not limited himself. He had perfect manners and was dazzling company. I admired Proust, and of the nineteenth-century French writers my favorite was, and still is, Flaubert. His manipulation of the language is masterly; you are not conscious of any effort, yet we know that he labored every sentence again and again, sometimes taking a whole day over it. As a result he produced the most lucid, beautiful prose. I have never been an *Hugolâtre:* he gets on his high horses which gallop away with him. But then he was a giant, and like all giants rather uneven.

INTERVIEWER

What about your own writing—does it come easily?

ACTON

Oh no! It used to be much easier when I was young. At times it seemed to pour out of me, and I never dreamed of correcting it. I believed it was a gift from on high. Now I rewrite and rewrite. . . . But as Sheridan said, "Easy reading is damned hard writing." Unless one is divinely inspired, like Shelley or Byron, to achieve the flow is the result of strenuous work.

INTERVIEWER

When did it start becoming difficult for you?

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ACTON

I think in middle age, after forty.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a routine? And do you write longhand?

ACTON

I do write longhand and type my own manuscripts, because as I type I correct and try to improve the text. I have an Italian secretary who comes in the mornings and takes care of chores—household bills and other such practical matters. I write at my desk, a long way from the telephone, otherwise it would be impossible to concentrate.

INTERVIEWER

You still do a lot of reviewing for literary magazines, such as *The Spectator.* What else are you working on at the moment?

ACTON

I am trying to write more short stories. Reviewing is very time-consuming, but editors send me recent publications and I get tempted—it is hard to say no, don't you think? It is usually a biography of someone I have known. Of course, most of my time is spent looking after this place. And all sorts of people ring up and come, as you know, and want to be shown the garden, that sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER

You are a victim of your own courtesy and generosity. I certainly would feel cheated if I came here without seeing you.

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ACTON

Oh, I don't mind friends—on the contrary, I welcome their visits. It's the strangers who ring up to ask if I know a good restaurant, as if I were a guide book! But it is getting better. Things do improve sometimes, don't they?

—Shusha Guppy

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Untitled (It Could Make Tonight the Best Part of Your Day)

Larry Johnson

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The waiter brought two more margaroties and I must say I was intrigued by Herr K's fantasy. But seein' as my cash balance was sunk, I was eager to propel my financial standin' upwards. And this pinstriper had yet to provide me with any (here's a word I snatched from a crossword puzzle book and I think it's worth five bucks) emollients.

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'm not interested in conspiratorial theories, in automatic theories of dominance and oppression or ones which make me the victim of dominant social codes. I have internalized a structure where I legislate my own behavior—my speech, my actions, my inclinations. I don't trace myself back to an essential self. I see myself as a by-product of the conditions that I find myself in.

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Case Manager Timothy Poole does not mince words.

"In the next hour and a half you are going to do something which could change your lives," says Poole. "It is called Risk Taking."

All eighty patients have to write down their darkest secrets on small pieces of paper and throw them into the center of the room. The secrets are then shuffled so no one might pick his or her own and the patients are asked to weave a story around the one picked.

A burly naval officer picks the secret of a gay gigolo in the group and begins to act out the role as if it is his own. He confesses his shame at taking money from wealthy men and wants to reform. By an ironic twist of fate, the gigolo chooses the navy man's secret from the pile. It turns out the sailor is actually a closet gay.

Can it be real? There is relief in the air. People are glad to come out in the open.

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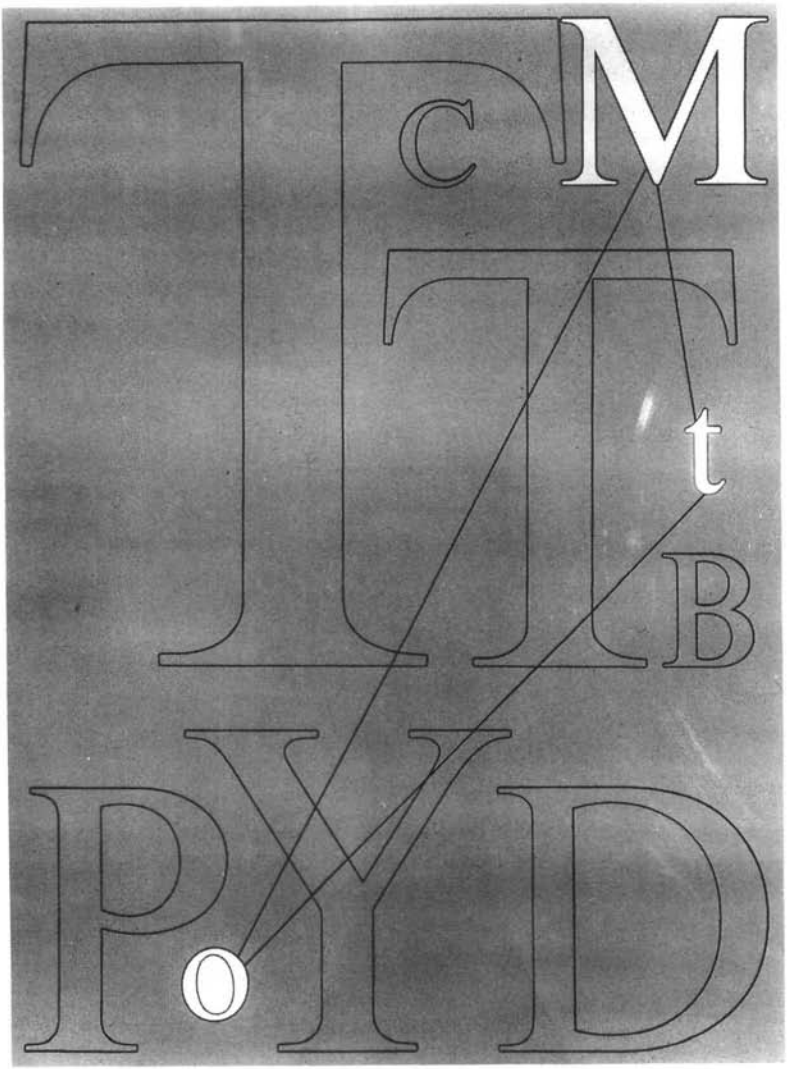

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I Swear I Won't Tell A Soul

There was a boy called Ted who had no mother. He lived with his father, the Elder Edward, and seven sisters. The youngest by several years, he was both pampered and ignored by all. While the sisters would sit sewing and chatting gaily with the adoring father, the boy would plough the fields alone. On Sundays the girls would clutch at him to be nearest at church and give him candy. The sisters were renowned in the county for their beauty; the boy shared in this his rosy complexion and golden hair. He spent much time alone, to the sometime consternument of his family. More was their worry when tragedy struck: Ted, who was now fourteen, was bringing in the crop when he trod upon the deadly Massasauga, which ferociously struck his right eye. It had to be removed to save his life. In time he became bitter and his sisters at last took him to the city.

There he saw a doctor, learned from the North, who fashioned him a beautiful eye of opaline glass, with an iris of bright blue and a pupil of deepest black. No one could tell the difference, he said. But one day as the boy ploughed the fields the fragile thing fell between the blades and was crushed to fragments. Again his spirits fell at the sight in the mirror of the withered empty socket. Attempts that followed for other eyes failed miserably, due to fragility, allergies, decomposition and other such problems. Chronically bereft, the lad became despondent, much doubting a future.

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Who Would I Tell?

Now his sisters went secretly to their father, the only man left whom they knew could help. Old Edward draughted plans, in mind the one substance that would counter the past's woes: wood. The delicacy this commission challenged drove him into a frenzied search for the most lustrous woods the world could store. From the deep wilds of Africa he procured a central timber of Entebony, black as ink. From the low Himalayas, lair of the Giant Panda, came supple limbs of the Bungo Tree, whose golden wood had a pink milky sap, and which yielded, when dried, a strange varnish like the pink and gold rays of dawn. Came sheets, planks, and boughs of rare Blue Prussian Fir, Valedictine Cypress, whose veins of silver came from the earth where it grew, False Red Birch, whose papery bark was deceptively ivory, for its reverse was a shock of scarlet. Trees whose sap made glue stronger than hide, whose leaves made pigments brighter than jewels, all these came. For he was after all a man obsessed. He wanted his son to see.

He locked himself in his small workshop. The furious mutterings that were sometime drowned out by the roar of a saw, or perhaps accompanied by the whizz of a measure tape retracting were the only confirmations that his anxious family heard of his existence for a month. The Christmas season grew close. At last he appeared, and presented the gift to the boy. It was beautiful, a master creation. Accustomed to the disappointments of the past, Ted became ecstatic and threw himself into the arms of his father. Oh, he could see!

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Brian Swann

Restoration of a Copy of an Imaginary Painting

dire, non pas tout crûment sa vision, mais
par un transfert instantané, constant,
l'écho de sa presence.

—Victor Segelen

White's designed to fake an edifice,
but the matted crenellation of reed-thatch
throws it to the side. A squadron of crows
clarifies the rhythm, carries the eye through
incendiary doors to large space. And the ancient
is open, that is to say, the habitation of Sun and Moon,
under the shoulders of the celestial Auroch, widening
the interior of the south, above the river that flows
by persimmon trees, above a statue, arms encircling
a trunk, so you're not sure who's upholding who,
bypassing the figure of a prince silhouetted
on a wall like Calvary.

The month is September.
Rosettes turn to the right, and fall. The sky
is vestiges of towers flecked by tongues of fire.
Women in white blouses file by. Behind them,
day is now totally dispossessed. But
just at that moment when the main matter
is about to be represented as rain and wings
in a dark garden, a bull bellowing, languages

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of accomplished uncomprehension, like those that descended on the apostles, are heard. The copyist may have been about to torture each tongue to say the same thing. But there is now no recourse. Everything before restoration is an unproven fact. Everything after is guesswork.

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David Lehman

At LaGuardia

I walk into the men's room at LaGuardia Airport
And the guy standing next to me zipping his fly
Has been dead for thirteen years. I know because
He was one of my professors in graduate school.
It's an awkward situation but we both try

To make the best of it. I ask him about the cause
Of death. He isn't entirely sure but guesses it was
A combination of methadone and cocaine.
Listening to our conversation is a man in overalls
And his teenage son. "I wonder where he got

The methadone," says the man. "I wonder where
He got the cocaine," says the son. To change
The subject I ask my old prof where he would rather
go,
China or Japan? I tell him he has to choose.
He nods, smiles. "I have nothing to lose."

On the radio, funds laid aside by investors
Planning their retirement were diverted to Belfast,
Where angry separatists are using them to buy guns,
While the wife of the pitcher who led both leagues in
shutouts
And allowed the fewest earned runs per nine innings
of work

Is now a spokesperson for the movement to enact
A constitutional amendment barring gender-based
discrimination.

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The old prof's skin begins flaking off and now I see
him as he is:
Welcome back, Dad. The man in overalls and his
teenage son
Are on the same flight with us, boarding in fifteen
minutes.

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Charlie Smith

Lies to the Dying

Today we are going into shelter,
we are going underground to discover the passage
that leads
to the next world. We will be happy there,
or we will not worry about happiness; we will make
neat designs
in skin and wool, emblems we set against the stone
walls
for posterity to find. Today I picture the generations
of our kind, crossing the marshy bridge into this
country,
picture the long ramble down the icy, scoured valleys,
and I wonder what made them do it, without
philosophy
or belief, without even much they wanted from the
earth.
I see them haggard at the edge of a muddy wallow,
their minds like notches cut into stone, the stick
they fling a kind of miracle, a glance like a handful of
fire
tossed in the air, no language to back them up.
Today,
from the suburbs, I salute them, as if I am drunk
and falsely exuberant, as if I am just leaving the house
of a friend who is dying, who has dragged her bed
under the window to watch the ordinary street pass
by.
I could tell lies to the dying, it would be easy,
easy to say that we are at the beginning, not at the
end,

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that all the business in the swamps with cutthroat beasts
was only prologue, as Homer was prologue,
as Dante and Stalin and your Aunt Edna were prologue,
that the trek is just getting under way here
as we flash our knives and call
over the "great distances of our longing"
promising to love each other the way we promised.

Let us think now of our lives, drifting in spirals of yellow weed,
and the islands, fragments merely, sea-washed, grass-haired,
giants standing to their brows in the sea, twirled in the sun . . .

Someone will create from our lives a story that tells
a truth we were waiting to hear, that is nothing like
the truths we learned in our days of power;
he will use other domesticos, other quick, toothy animals,
another lover or two, thinking beasts, a white-haired woman
squatting at the edge of a grassy pond
perhaps, or someone no one can think of now,
and from this we will begin to encounter, deep in our bodies,
the movement of another time and place,
the movement in another part of our brain
that we confuse with heart or spirit.
We will step out under the scarlet starfire
and stand there holding someone in our arms
whom we can't even imagine now,
ready for the next terrible venture, for the next slagheap

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to climb and clamber over the top of singing
or crying, forcing our pity into the lives of our
friends,
taking in our skinny arms one more time these bent
and troubled creatures, these midgets and posturers
dripping stinks their fathers tried to forget,
smashing our fists into the face of all that we love.

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Two Poems by Steven Cramer

Jacuzzi

Chlorine and languor and vaporous
Threads rising like the steam off soup,
This brackish whirlpool wrinkles us,
And turns us briefly old until our time
Runs out: twenty minutes at the most.
But it's nothing like those girls
Who heated me to my fingernails
When we slowdanced on lantern-lit patios,
My palms so moist they squeaked
As the girls squealed, pointing,
And my face burned faintly, blue.
Twelve of us, strangers, ring the tub.
Like those early surgeons who bled
The sick, we're convinced sweat heals,
And loitering in these eddying pools,
Buoyed by the undercurrents, flushes out
The mortal downrush coursing through us.
So that day a new guest waded in—
A man so thin, so undone,
He looked like a trembling aspen
In a flood—we all looked, at a loss,
Then looked away, scanning our hands
For paper cuts, for sores, torn nails,
Any breach in the skin, through which
The idea of such illness could get in.
No one found the nerve to speak, or leave
When the time came. After he waded out,
Trunks clinging to his hips like drenched

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Newsprint, we stayed in long enough
For him to shower, dry off, dress.
While the water swirled around us,
I'm sure I heard that August breeze
Disquieting the paper lanterns,
Carrying those girlish whispers back.

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Nocturne

Our eyes nearly shut, we hadn't planned
To talk of death, when the word
Itself, like a jolt

From the bedside phone came crowding out
Those idlings the childless
Doze off with—

No name just right for our unconceived
Daughter or son. Then I said
Suppose one dies before

We die, its high-pitched syllable repeating,
Ringing so true I could tell
You heard it also,

Our hearts thumping through the bedframe
Until there was no hope of sleep.
Oh, we tried

To "talk the subject out,"
Then to take deep breaths of it—
Oxide we'll exhale

Someday for good; and today I'm up
Working hard to tell you how
I'm tired of this

Appetite for loss, every bereavement
A kind of neighborhood I watch
From my attic window,

Searching for lyric shocks to release
Full-voiced odes and palinodes
Wild as the ooze

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Of bloodroot sap. This is the worst
Bad faith: insisting death requires
A body and a face

The way a heartbeat needs the name
Daniel, if it's a boy; *Angela,*
If it's a girl.

But even while I elegize our talk
(Hearing the neighbor's children
Smack a whiffle ball,

Then watching the smallest boy unleash
An insouciant arc of piss
Against his house),

I suspect the dead survive our praise
That shadows them, finally
To admonish us,

Like the night before my father died,
When I last listened to his voice—
Just thought I'd call.

I'm feeling much better; they say
I might go home this week or next.—
And routinely erased

His message with the others on the tape.

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Ira Sadoff

On the Job

I support the animals' urge to survive.
So much for opinions. Slithering, writhing,
nosing my way through dirt, I can identify

with that. I joke to keep the system going.
So whatever the effect of clearing island fog
with concomitant deer nibbling berry bushes

at dusk, I keep my distance. I keep the home office
—pencil scratches, accommodating memos, bows—
yawning. But the gnawing animal stalks us,

keeps us feeding and feeling weak. Garcia Lorca
once said, "When the moon rises, the heart feels
like an island in infinity." Who can improve on that?

My labor must mean something. The worn salt lick,
narrow paths and droppings in my meadow, velvet
residue
of antlers, all are real enough. I keep the hunters out.

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Mark Rudman

Back Stairwell

I've chosen to take the stairs.
It's harder, but quicker

than waiting for the elevator
which seems eternally stuck on R—Roof.

And I'm late, the last of the parents
who don't send a stand-in.

I'm running, propelled by a kind of demon
—and embarrassed by my lateness—

up the back stairs of the synagogue,
when a window appears in the shaft,

on the wall of the stairwell;
a real window, like a painting on a wall

through which you can see the sky.
The shattered blue leans in, breaks

through the wall; it leaves
an opening, a sudden shudder, a frisson

like a rustle of eternity
shattered in the vista of receding

clouds, antennae, water towers . . .
and I think we are not far from ecstasy

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even in the interior.
I can't get my son to hold the banister

as we descend the stairs;
a look of sheer defiance clouds his face,

the same boy who, the other night
I watched shuffle and backpedal and nearly fall,

down the escalator, over
the rapids of the raw-toothed

edges of the blades;
his hands, his attention, occupied

by a rabbit samurai Ninja turtle
and Krang, the bodiless brain.

I gauged the dive I would need
to catch him if he fell:

a flat out floating horizontal grab
I couldn't even have managed in my youth.

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Two Poems by Marcia Slatkin

The Passion

The duck dead and gutted,
we walk the vaulted cavity
to the heart; large,
dark, set at the tilt
that till now let it pump.

We dissect the neck
and find blue threads
embedded
in the crimson flesh.
A single nick
spills scarlet death.

We unwind
entrails, feeling
brilliant yellow fat
like topaz dough,
risen and waxed.

As we wrench gall
from liver lobes,
the dripping bile
glows more green
than pine
against whitest snow.

In changing
bird to meat, we see
the deepest, strangest
secret things.

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The Last Duck

We trapped him—
the dignified male
with the graceful neck—
and held him down
till drowned. His death

was ugly. His heart
wouldn't let his wings
go limp. They hit
the lip of the tub like fists.
There were long, slow moments
when we could have let him live.
Then his beak bubbled death,
and we didn't. That day

a silence stilled the yard.
The ducks didn't fly, drink, eat,
or bob their mobile necks to speak,
but stood, breath-stopped as stone.

In time,
they sought the boulder
he'd used as throne,
exhaled sighs
like oboe notes,

and the gargling roll
from the root of their throats
flooded through
each bite we chewed
of this last duck
we killed for food.

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Two Poems by Tess Gallagher

We're All Pharaohs When We Die

Our friends die with us
and the sky too
in huge swatches, and lakes, and places
we walked past, just going and
coming.
The spoons we ate with look dim, a little deadened
in the drawer. Their trips to the mouth
forlorn, and the breath caught there is
fogged to a pewtery smudge.

Our friends die with us and are thrown in because we used them so well.
But they also stay on earth awhile like the abandoned
huts of the Sherpas on a mountain that doesn't know
it's being climbed. They don't fall down all at once.
Not like his heart
fell down, dragging
the whole gliding eternity of him out of sight.

Guttural and aslant, I chew the leather sleeve
of his jacket, teething like a child on the unknown pressure
budding near its tongue. But the tongue
is thrown in too, everyone's who said his name as he used to be called
in our waking and sleeping,
dreaming and telling the dreams.
Yes, the dreams are thrown in and we come back
into them where someone else left off.

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So the mystery
breaks through still wearing its lid, as I
am wearing my lid
and am never to be seen again
out of his muslin striding.

If this is my lid then, with its eyebrows painted on,
with its
stylized eyes glazed open above the yet-to-be dead
ones, even so
a dead-aliveness looks through
as trees are thrown in
and clouds and the meadows
under the orchards
the deer like to enter—those returning souls
who agree to be seen
gazing out of their forest-eyes
with our faint world painted over them.

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Precious

He gave me a spruce lap desk
for writing in bed that Christmas.
It was rubbed into fragrance with oil of almond
and to lift the slanted top was to fall
into reveries with pens and the child's
delight in things unused. But it lay heavily
against my knees, as if a lid had closed
down on me. It saddened him, I know, to see
how seldom I used it. Some gifts are sent
only to haunt. Now he's gone
how lightly it rests the length of my thighs, and
lightly does my pen move the heavy words
under the downcast lids.

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Decor

Murray Pomerance

(1)

"Listen," Trudy Kay had Ettie Savage on the telephone and she was breathing somewhat more forcefully than normal. "About your living room. You'll remember I was talking to you the other day. I want you to know I haven't forgotten. I've been thinking. I've been turning it over in my mind. We've got to do something about that room. We absolutely have to. Do you know what it's like now? It's depressing. I get depressed when I go in there. It's cramped and tight and you can't figure out where anything is. Do you remember when we were designing it with Ed? Do you remember? The whole idea was to have *space*—" After saying *space* she paused and gave a forceful breath, as though to create space over the telephone. Then, when all Ettie could do was insert a tiny "Well," she carried on: "The furniture. We have to do something about the furniture. Because nobody in his right mind can find a place to sit down. And I'll tell you another thing, there aren't enough ashtrays, but that's

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something else. But you have to be able to sit *down.* I don't know how you can live there. I don't understand where you sit. It was originally intended—don't you remember what Ed originally intended?—there'd be plenty of incidental activity going on, but I don't know how you can do it. Everybody's afraid to sit. *I'm* afraid to sit. Ed didn't expect people would be burning holes in the sofa with their cigarettes or cutting holes with scissors or letting the dogs do their, you know, *business* on the chairs. You know . . . And the piano, you see what I mean? The piano. And the plants. And the pictures. It's all gone wrong, it's all gone meshugge. You know what I mean, meshugge?" Ettie coughed a little, in a genteel fashion although she knew perfectly well how to avoid gentility. "I can't believe you like it that way. Tell me. You like having everything all over the place? Because *I* couldn't tolerate it. *I* just die when I'm in that kind of situation. Robert Keneally's coming out. He comes out, you know. He's coming out anyway so I thought I'd just get hold of him and we'd go over the place with a fine-tooth comb. If you're talking decoration there isn't anybody else, I'm sure you know that. Trust me. He'll take one look at your place and it'll be pure creativity." When Ettie put the phone down and looked around the room it seemed fine, it was as it always had been, so she thought she'd better have a look with her glasses but trying under all the magazines she couldn't find them.

(2)

On a day when there was nobody in the house, and when the dogs had been boarded and the plants watered and the bird feeders on the patio filled to capacity, Trudy Kay gained access to the house. She rolled into the graveled drive in her 1971 Ford Fairmont with the clutch that stuck. She waited. A 1979 Honda Civic rolled in after

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her, as gray as the gray translucent sky. Robert Keneally got out. He wore maple-colored corduroy trousers, a burgundy velour shirt, a pair of slippers. They stood for long minutes in the graveled drive and she pointed and he nodded and she pointed up at the yawning oak trees and he looked away. They came into the house as though perhaps she would sell it to him—"Isn't it wonderful?" "Isn't it spacious?"—and his eyes were rolling over the hibiscus and the poinsettia and the tumbling jades, the spreading lawns of violets, the Boston ferns blocking the light like jungle growth. She gave him the long tour, so that before they arrived at the living room they passed all of the bedrooms, and the four baths, and the study, and the parlor, the kitchen, the basement, the wine cellar, the sauna, and the nook where breakfast could be taken beneath a poster of a Toulouse-Lautrec. "Ahhh," said Robert Keneally, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes."

(3)

Next to the living room, and six steps above it, was a parlor, and in the parlor were picture windows, and through the picture windows drizzled a light that was even and melancholy and blue. Robert Keneally stood there for long minutes, turning his face from the window to gaze around the high, small room. The room filled him with a sense of pleasure. Then he stepped down the stairs to the lower space, where in the corner there was a canvas by Willem de Kooning and a Steinway concert grand on the lid of which two dying pink amaryllidaceous flowers sat. He ran his hand over the surface of the piano, ebony, needing polish. "I think," he said softly, "This . . . there." And his aquiline nose and eyes as dark as coals gave onto the parlor. "Where the window is." He stepped away, and stepped back, and stepped away. "With the keyboard . . . against . . . the window." Trudy

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Kay was watching every move he made. It did not occur to her that there was a dancer in him. "Against the wall? You mean against the wall? All the way over there?" He lowered his voice as she waited and his answer rang out in the silence like an incantation. "The window," he moved back and forth along the keyboard, "is here, you see. Here. The keys . . . are beside . . . the window . . . in the window light . . ."

(4)

She sat herself on the sofa that would need to be recovered, that had cigarette burns and puncture wounds from scissors all over its surface, and over the top of the television listings from the *Times* she scanned the wall where he was standing. There was the de Kooning, and then a Prohaska, and then a Motherwell and a Dash and a very small thing by Lee Krasner. "You know," she said, and her voice had an insistent buzz, "I don't know why, but that wall doesn't do a lot for me. I think the paneling can go." Beneath the row of paintings, glowing in the late afternoon light, was paneling. "I think the paneling can go because, search me, it doesn't give me that satisfying feeling. Do you know what I mean, Robert?" He was moving very quietly with a folding ruler. He had the ruler folded out to six feet. He was using it vertically and horizontally on the wall in question. To no one in particular he murmured, "Bookshelves." "Brilliant!" she said. "Bookshelves would be very nice. And I think the paneling goes, wouldn't you say? It definitely doesn't speak up for itself." Keneally moved his ruler. "Why?" his voice was softer than ever, directed only at himself although he stared at her while he spoke. "Why? We're covering with bookshelves. If we're covering with bookshelves why play with the paneling?" And she thought for a moment, squinted up her wrinkled eyelids, lit herself a cigarette and puffed it zealously. "It's just me, you see. My idiosyn-

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cratic taste. But in my place when I did the walls I used rosewood, not this stuff, and my walls have stood up considerably better than these if you ask me. But rosewood does that, doesn't it, Robert—stands up? Tell me, don't you adore this ceiling?—" He was moving slowly around the room, squinting at the windows, placing the extended ruler along the fronts of the chairs and whispering to himself. "Robert, don't you think this ceiling's marvelous? Ed didn't come up with that on his own, you know. Do you know who suggested that to Ed?" He looked at her openly. "Me," she said, "It's one of the only things in this place that hasn't gone to the dogs, if you'll pardon the expression. I'll tell you, Robert," she doused the cigarette, "The more I think about it the more I'm convinced—that wall has to go. It's an eyesore. You walk in here and you look at it and immediately you want to leave." He was moving along the wall in question, skimming the air with his finger. "Bookshelves . . . here . . . I think . . . ," and his palm was clasping and unclasping itself over the surfaces of the Krasner, the Dash, the Motherwell, the Prohaska, the de Kooning. "An original de Kooning—my God!" Then Trudy Kay gave a peremptory little sigh and spoke with a wheeze that was sinister. "Robert—although I have to admit the bookshelves are brilliant, I have to say: one way to look at this is that you're solving the books problem. And the other way—is that you're creating the pictures problem. Isn't life delicious!"

(5)

"You'd think," said Trudy Kay, "she'd keep some crackers here. I'm fainting. All she has is saltines. What's saltines when you're fainting? You'd think she'd have some decent cheese biscuits. Do you suppose she has any cheese? If I have to eat saltines there might at least be some cheese. She probably hasn't bought any cheese in

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months. The refrigerator is probably full of exotic cheeses she bought three months ago. You see, it's that kind of a family, Robert. We're trying to get the living room right for a bunch of people who sit around eating saltines. Do you see what I'm trying to say? See, we could do the kitchen over again, too. There'd have to be a new refrigerator and new cupboards. The oven I know she put in just last year. We'd have to take the counters apart completely. You know it doesn't take much, sometimes I think even if I had a little piece of cheddar I'd be satisfied."

(6)

He had wanted to make a map on a piece of paper that had blue lines and he had asked her for a pencil. "Pencils everywhere and none of them have a point," she said. "Isn't it perfect? Isn't it exactly what you'd expect? That's how they live here, without pencils." So she had gone out to her car to get him a pencil and in the silence he had taken himself to the windows that gave onto the patio. There was an aviary of sorts out there. The cherry trees, the wild pear, were laden heavily with feeders, and the pine was heavy with feeders, and the birds were fluttering and jousting from perch to perch in the silvery light that was shooting in shafts through the branches. He did not know how to name them, but the artist's eye in him was held unmeasuring and shuddering with joy at the manifold finches, the gold finches and purple finches; and the reckless blue jays swooping and scattering; and the cowbirds who strutted haphazardly; the grackles who poked; the crows poking with the grackles; the indigo buntings, one turned fully turquoise and one molting; the cardinals, male and female, singing from flaming beaks, "Chew, chew"; the doves swirling along the patio pave like aging waltzers at the Waldorf; woodpeckers

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pecking at suet and orioles with blazing wings and tawny-breasted towhees, black-capped chickadees, proud and prancing pheasants craning their ringed necks both curious and terrified, terrified and curious as they caught his eye and strode away. There were a dozen garbage pails, battered, some lettered so that he could read them: "Bird mix," "Blk sunflr sds," "Thistle sds," "Cracked seed," "Millet," and others in a row behind now, as a cloud moved, shining with a radiance of pure silver. "The money they must have to do this!" he whispered to himself, and he held a great sigh within his chest, and then she was back with a pencil from the car but it turned out to have no point so he was reduced to using a pen with blue ink to make lines on the paper already covered evenly with lines that were blue.

(7)

As he sketched, Robert Keneally hummed. He hummed "Top Hat" and "S'wonderful, S'marvelous That You Should Care for Me," and then "Cheek to Cheek" with a little shift of his hips. Trudy Kay took his place at the window and gawked at the birds feeding. "Isn't it something, those blue jays?" she was rather loud. "They're such criminals. He's got them all over, you know. The property is covered with them. Did you know—he's a naturalist. He's always been that way. Well, you can see by all the trees. Look at that blue jay! The blue jays are just pigs, you know, they just dive in and eat everybody else's food. I'll tell you what I think—if ever there was a bird who couldn't mind his own business, it's the blue jay. Look, look—" she was cackling, "They take from everybody!" The decorator was standing back from the scene of his imaginary creation to a moment of imaginary evaluation. His eyes screwed tight. His fingers spread out in front of him. He paused

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and took a slender cigarette and inserted it between his lips. "Mmmm," he said. "It's going to be lovely." And he moved, ahead, back, to the side, ahead, back, to the side, and his hands were limp at his sides, and he seemed to know where the paintings would be rebirthed and to see the wall covered with books and the furnishings reestablished. "Do you know what I have?" said Trudy Kay. "I have sparrows."

(8)

They had moved out to where the cars were parked and were conferring a last time on the gravel. "Let me tell you what I think we should do, Robert," she said. "I'm honestly not exaggerating, not that I would ever exaggerate, but I really do get a sense from the place . . . and you have to remember I know what Ed had in mind when he did the original designs, I mean, I know everything . . . that it should be . . . another place altogether. The two of them had a long conference with Ed, believe me, and I was there for all of it. Because who do you think brought Ed in in the first place? Who do you think got them Ed?" He looked into her eyes. "Right. Because we go back a long way, Ed and I. We go back to Provincetown." "My God," he said softly. "Sure—we go back to Provincetown, and you know what it was like in *those* days. So I made the connection for him. Well, I made it for all of them. And I know what they were talking about. I understand the spirit of the thing. You know what I mean by spirit, Robert. That wall, the paneling, really should go. Really. The whole damned thing, once and for all. And we'll do the bookshelves, which is your idea. It's a terrific idea, Robert. We'll do the bookshelves. And then we'll put the piano somewhere out of the way, maybe in the parlor. But, you know; we'll have to leave the parlor window free because they let the dogs

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in and out there. You know they have dogs—I'm sure I told you. Little dogs. Pekingese or Balinese or terriers or something. They're coming in and out all day long. A thing like that would drive me crazy. I'll tell you what else. We could think about redoing the floor, because I'm not wild about the floor she's got in there if you want to know the truth. The dogs are always, you know, crapping on it and the whole thing is just generally out of the question. And the more I think about it the more I'm convinced we should take that paneling out and maybe—we're getting pretty adventuresome here, Robert—expand the room outwards over the patio. Do you know what I mean, on the far side, where he's got that bird stuff? Because the only thing out there is the birds, you know. We can dispense with them if we have to. It's just blue jays, isn't it? They'll find somewhere else to eat. Or we could relocate the whole thing, the feeders and everything, inside the garage, a kind of bird schmooze-house. That would be charming. And it would give us double the living room. Can you imagine the view! See, Robert—do you know how long I've known Ettie? Thirty-five years. That's a hell of a long time." "It certainly is," he whispered. "That's a hell of a long time and I know the way she thinks. You have to respect the way a person thinks, that's my bottom line. I'll tell you how she thinks. She's not happy with this. She tells everybody she's happy because she doesn't want to upset—him. Because why? Because he's very sensitive. I should have told you, maybe it's not very important, but he's sensitive. She's never for a minute been happy with the kitchen and she doesn't like the piano down there. Since the piano's down there she never plays it anymore. She used to play it all the time. And the blue jays—they're driving her crazy. She wants shelves for books. That was a fabulous idea, Robert, really. But fundamentally she's not happy, she's not fulfilled, which is my bottom line. She wants space, that's what she wants. She wants freedom. I think

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if we could just clean the place out and start over again she'd be a lot happier." He saw what she meant. He took his piece of blue-lined paper on which he'd made a blue map and he folded it and stuffed it in his hip pocket. He gently touched the handle of the door of his car. "Do you really want to know what I think of that paneling?" she was half turning away from him, lowering her voice so that no creature hiding in the trees could overhear. "How long did I say I've known them, thirty-five years? For thirty-five years every time I go into that room I think I'm at a funeral."

(9)

Their two cars were parked beside one another on the gravel driveway, the driveway shaped like a half moon that opened doubly onto the street. Her car was facing one direction, his was facing the other. At the steering wheels, with their windows down, they could be conversing in a kind of intimacy. "Robert—you'll let me handle it with her, right? There's no need at this level for you to be getting involved. I've known her for thirty-five years." They drove away from one another and he mused as he drove along the majestic dunes that it was, in all truth, one of the most beautiful houses he'd ever seen. He put a cigarette to his lips. He thought about an interesting new design for bookshelves that would let the magnificent paneling glow through.

(10)

Ettie stood in a still posture with Doc at the window while the finches and orioles and doves quibbled for their food and the scrambling dogs yelped with joy to be home from the kennel, and while Trudy Kay, in her bathtub, dreamed of pulling out the garden Ettie had planted and

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replacing it with Japanese bonsai, and while Keneally made careful drawings of the grand piano by the blue window light of the parlor, guiding his hand in a meticulous silence but hearing in his thoughts Ettie sitting at the keys and playing, perhaps from memory on a sombre afternoon, Chopin.

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Günter Grass: DIE WOLKE ALS FAUST ÜBERM WALD

- Ein Nachruf -

2. Fassung April 1990

Vom Sommer achtundachtzig bis in den Winter neunundachtzig hinein zeichnete ich, unterbrochen nur von [redacted] Tatsachenbehauptungen des Zeitgeschehens, totes Holz. Ein Jahrzehnt ging zu Ende, [redacted] an dessen Anfang ich mit "Kopfgeburten - oder die Deutschen sterben aus" mein Menetekel gesetzt hatte; doch was nun, Bilanz ziehend, unterm Strich stand, war keine Kopfgeburt mehr: anschaulich lagen Buchen, Kiefern, denen das Strammstehen vergangen war, Birken, um ihr Ansehen gebracht, vordatiert die Hinfälligkeit der Eichen. Und bemüht, diesen [redacted] Ausdruck von Forstarbeit zu steigern, traten zu Beginn des neuen Jahrzehnts namentlich kurz nacheinander Orkane auf, [redacted] fünf an der Zahl, gewillt, mit aufgerissenen Baumscheiben Waldsterben zu spielen.

Es war wie Leichenfleddern. Hinsehen und festhalten. Oft fotografiert und farbig oder schwarzweiß zur Ansicht gebracht blieb dennoch unglaubhaft, was Statistiken und amtliche Waldzustandsberichte bebildern sollte. Fotos kann jeder machen. Wer traut schon Fotos!

Also zeichnete ich vor Ort: in einem dänischen Mischwald, im Oberharz, im Erzgebirge, gleich hinterm Haus, wo Wald dicht ansteht und das Nadelholz aufgegeben hat. Anfangs wollte ich mich mit Skizzen begnügen und den feingesiebten [redacted] Rest, was man nicht sieht, was im Ausschüssen vertagt, in Gutachten und Gegengutachten zerredet oder im allgemeinen Gequassel beschwiegen wird, aufschreiben, wie ich anderes, zuletzt den Alltag in Calcutta aufgeschrieben hatte. Aber über den Wald, wie er stirbt, steht [redacted] alles geschrieben. Über [redacted] Ursachen und Verursacher. Woran und wie schnell oder langsam er auf Kammlagen oder

A manuscript page from the second draft of Die Wolke als Faust überm Wald, *by Günter Grass.*

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Günter Grass

The Art of Fiction CXXIV

Günter Grass has achieved a very rare thing in contemporary arts and letters, earning both critical respect and commercial success in every genre and artistic medium he has taken up. A novelist, poet, essayist, dramatist, sculptor and graphic artist, Grass appeared on the international literary scene with the publication of his first novel, the 1958 best-seller The Tin Drum. *It and his subsequent works—the novella* Cat and Mouse *(1961) and the novel* Dog Years *(1963)—are popularly known as the Danzig trilogy. His many other books include* From the Diary of a Snail *(1972),* The Flounder

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(1977), The Meeting at Telgte *(1979),* Headbirths, or The Germans are Dying Out *(1980),* The Rat *(1986) and* Show Your Tongue *(1989). Grass always designs his own book jackets, and his books often contain illustrations by the author. He has been the recipient of numerous literary prizes and medals, including the 1965 Georg Büchner Prize and the Carl von Ossietzky Medal (1977), and is a foreign honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.*

Grass was born in 1927 on the Baltic coast, in a suburb of the Free City of Danzig, now Gdansk, Poland. His parents were grocers. During World War II he served in the German Army as a tank gunner, and was wounded and captured by American forces in 1945. After his release, he worked in a chalk mine and then studied art in Düsseldorf and Berlin. He married his first wife, the Swiss ballet dancer Anna Schwarz, in 1954. From 1955 to 1967, he participated in the meetings of Group 47, an informal but influential association of German writers and critics, so called because it first met in September of 1947. Its members, including Heinrich Böll, Uwe Johnson, Ilse Aichinger and Grass, were organized around their common mission to develop and use a literary language which stood in radical opposition to the complex and ornate prose style characteristic of Nazi-era propaganda. They last met in 1967.

Living on a small stipend from the publishing house Luchterhand, Grass and his family spent the years 1956 to 1959 in Paris, where he wrote The Tin Drum. *In 1958 he won the annual prize of Group 47 for his readings from the work-in-progress. The novel shocked and astounded German critics and readers, confronting them for the first time with a harsh depiction of the German bourgeoisie during the Second World War. Grass's 1979 volume,* The Meeting at Telgte, *is a fictitious account of a meeting of German poets in 1647, at the close of the Thirty Years' War. The purpose of the fictional gathering, as well as the book's cast of characters, parallels that of the post-World War II Group 47.*

In Germany, Grass has long been as well known for his controversial politics as he is for his celebrated novels. He was Willy Brandt's chief speechwriter for ten years and is a longtime

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supporter of the Social Democratic Party. Lately, he has been one of the few German intellectuals to protest publicly the swift course German reunification has taken. In 1990 alone, Grass published two volumes of lectures, speeches and debates on the subject.

When he is not traveling, he divides his time between his estate in Schleswig-Holstein where he lives with his second wife Ute Grunert and the house in the Schöneberg section of Berlin where his four children were raised and where his assistant Eva Hönisch now manages his affairs. This interview was conducted in two sessions, one before an audience at the 92nd Street YMWHA in Manhattan and one last fall at the yellow house on Niedstraße, when Grass had found a few hours' time during a brief stopover. He spoke in small gable-windowed study with white walls and wooden floors. The far corner was piled high with boxes of books and manuscripts. Grass was dressed comfortably, in a tweed jacket and button-down shirt. He had originally agreed to do an interview in English, thereby circumventing the complications of subsequent translation, but when reminded of this squinted his eyes and smiled, announcing, "I am much too tired! We will speak German." Despite his professed travel-weariness, he spoke with energy and enthusiasm about his work, often laughing quietly. The interview ended when his twin sons Raoul and Franz arrived to pick their father up for a dinner to celebrate their birthday.

INTERVIEWER

How did you become a writer?

GÜNTER GRASS

I think it had something to do with the social situation in which I grew up. Ours was a lower-middle class family; we had a small, two-room apartment. My sister and I did not have our own rooms, or even a place to ourselves. In the living room, beyond the two windows, was a little corner where my books were kept, and other things—my

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watercolors and so on. Often I had to imagine the things I needed. I learned very early to read amidst noise. And so I started writing and drawing at an early age. Another result is that I now collect rooms. I have a study in four different places. I'm afraid to return again to the situation of my youth, with only a corner in one small room.

INTERVIEWER

What made you turn to reading and writing in this situation, rather than, say, to sports or some other distraction?

GRASS

As a child I was a great liar. Fortunately my mother liked my lies. I promised her marvelous things. When I was ten years old she called me "Peer Gynt." "Peer Gynt," she said, "here you are telling me marvelous stories about journeys we will make to Naples and so on . . . " I started to write down my lies very early. And I continue to do so! I started a novel when I was twelve years old. It was about the Kashubians, who turned up many years later in *The Tin Drum*, where Oskar's grandmother, Anna, (like my own) is Kashubian. But I made a mistake in writing my first novel: all the characters I had introduced were dead at the end of the first chapter. I couldn't go on! This was my first lesson in writing: be careful with your characters.

INTERVIEWER

What lies have given you the greatest pleasure?

GRASS

Lies that do not hurt, which are different from lies that protect oneself or hurt another person. That is not my business. But the truth is mostly very boring, and you can help it along with lies. There is no harm in that. I have learned that all my terrible lies really have no effect on what is out there. If, several years ago, I had written

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something that predicted the recent political developments in Germany, people would have said, "What a liar!"

INTERVIEWER

What was your next effort after the failed novel?

GRASS

My first book was a book of poetry and drawings. Invariably the first drafts of my poems combine drawings and verse, sometimes taking off from an image, sometimes from words. Then, when I was twenty-five years old and could afford to buy a typewriter, I preferred to type with my two-finger system. The first version of *The Tin Drum* was done just with the typewriter. Now I'm getting older and though I hear that many of my colleagues are writing with computers, I've gone back to writing the first draft by hand! The first version of *The Rat* is in a large book of unlined paper, which I got from my printer. When one of my books is about to be published I always ask for one blind copy with blank pages to use for the next manuscript. So, these days the first version is written by hand, with drawings, and then the second and the third are done on a typewriter. I have never finished a book without writing three versions. Usually there are four, with many corrections.

INTERVIEWER

Does each version begin at "alpha" and proceed to "omega"?

GRASS

No. I write the first draft quickly. If there's a hole, there's a hole. The second version is generally very long, detailed and complete. There are no more holes, but it's a bit dry. In the third draft I try to regain the spontaneity of the first, and to retain what is essential from the second. This is very difficult.

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INTERVIEWER

What is your daily schedule when you work?

GRASS

When I'm working on the first version, I write between five and seven pages a day. For the third version, three pages a day. It's very slow.

INTERVIEWER

You do this in the morning or in the afternoon or at night?

GRASS

Never, never at night. I don't believe in writing at night because it comes too easily. When I read it in the morning it's not good. I need daylight to begin. Between nine and ten o'clock I have a long breakfast with reading and music. After breakfast I work, and then take a break for coffee in the afternoon. I start again and finish at seven o'clock in the evening.

INTERVIEWER

How do you know when a book is finished?

GRASS

When I am working on an epic-length book, the writing process is fairly long. It takes from four to five years to get through all the drafts. The book is done when I am exhausted.

INTERVIEWER

Brecht was compelled to rewrite his works all the time. Even after they were published he never considered them finished.

GRASS

I don't think I could do that. I can only write a book like *The Tin Drum* or *From the Diary of a Snail* at a special

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period of my life. The books came about because of how I felt and thought at the time. I'm sure that if I were to sit down and rewrite *The Tin Drum* or *Dog Years* or *From the Diary of a Snail* I would destroy it.

INTERVIEWER

How do you distinguish your nonfiction from your fiction?

GRASS

This "fiction versus nonfiction" business is nonsense. It may be useful to booksellers to classify books by genre, but I don't like having my books categorized that way. I've always imagined some committee of booksellers holding meetings to decide which books should be called fiction and which nonfiction. I say what the booksellers are doing is fiction!

INTERVIEWER

Well, when you write essays or speeches is the method, the technique different from what you use when you tell stories and make things up?

GRASS

Yes, it's different because I am confronted with facts I cannot change. It's not very often that I keep a diary, but I did in preparation for *From the Diary of a Snail*. I had the feeling that 1969 would be an important year, that it would bring about real political change beyond just ushering in a new government. So while I was on the road campaigning from March to September of 1969—a long time—I kept a diary. The same happened to me in Calcutta. The diary I kept then developed into *Show Your Tongue*.

INTERVIEWER

How do you juggle your political activism with your visual art and your writing?

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GRASS

Writers are involved not only with their inner, intellectual lives, but also with the process of daily life. For me, writing, drawing and political activism are three separate pursuits; each has its own intensity. I happen to be especially attuned to and engaged with the society in which I live. Both my writing and my drawing are invariably mixed up with politics, whether I want them to be or not. I don't actually set out with a plan to bring politics into something I'm writing. It's much more that with the third or fourth time I scratch away at a subject, I discover things that have been neglected by history. While I would never write a story that was simply and specifically about some political reality, I see no reason to omit politics, which has such a great, determining power over our lives. It seeps into every aspect of life in one way or another.

INTERVIEWER

You incorporate so many different genres into your work—history, recipes, lyrics . . .

GRASS

. . . and drawings, poems, dialogue, quotations, speeches, letters! You see, when dealing with epic concepts I find it necessary to use every aspect of language available and the most diverse forms of linguistic communication. Remember though, that some of my books are very pure in form: the novella *Cat and Mouse* and *The Meeting at Telgte*.

INTERVIEWER

Your interlocking of words and drawing is unique.

GRASS

Drawing and writing are the primary components of my work, but not the only ones; I also sculpt when I have the time. For me, there is a very clear give-and-take

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relationship between art and writing. Sometimes this relationship is stronger, other times weaker. In the last few years it has been very strong. *Show Your Tongue,* which takes place in Calcutta, is an example of this. I could never have brought that book into existence without drawing. The incredible poverty in Calcutta constantly draws the visitor into situations where language is stifled—you cannot find words. Drawing helped me to find words again while I was there.

INTERVIEWER

In that book, the text of the poems appears not only in print, but also in handwriting superimposed on the drawings. Are the words to be considered a graphic element and a part of the drawings?

GRASS

Some elements of the poems were formulated or suggested by the drawings. When words finally came to me, I began to write on top of what I had drawn—text and drawing superimposed on one another. If you can make out the words in the drawings, that's fine; they are there to be read. But the drawings generally contain early drafts, what I first wrote by hand before sitting myself down at the typewriter. It was very difficult to write this book, and I'm not sure why. Perhaps it was the subject, Calcutta. I have been there twice. The first time was eleven years before I began *Show Your Tongue*. It was my first time in India. I spent only a few days in Calcutta. I was shocked. There was, from the beginning, the wish to come back, to stay longer, to see more, to write things down. I went on other voyages, in Asia, Africa, but whenever I saw the slums of Hong Kong or Manila or Jakarta, I was reminded of the situation in Calcutta.

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There is no other place I know where the problems of the first world are so openly mixed up with those of the third, out in the in daylight.

So I went to Calcutta again, and I lost my ability to use language. I couldn't write a word. At this point the drawing became important. It was another way of trying to capture the reality of Calcutta. With the help of the drawings I was finally able to write prose again—that is the first section of the book, a kind of essay. After that I began work on the third section, a long poem of twelve parts. It is a city poem, about Calcutta. If you look at the prose, drawings and poem together, you see that they deal with Calcutta in related but separate ways. There is a dialogue among them, although the textures of the three are very different.

INTERVIEWER

Is any one of these textures more important than the others?

GRASS

I can answer, only for myself, that poetry is the most important thing. The birth of a novel begins with a poem. I will not say it is ultimately more important, but I can't do without it. I need it as a starting point.

INTERVIEWER

A more dignified art form, perhaps, than the others?

GRASS

No, no, no! Prose, poetry and drawings stand side by side in a very democratic way in my work.

INTERVIEWER

Is there something physical, sensual about the act of drawing that is absent from the process of writing?

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GRASS

Yes. Writing is a genuinely laborious and abstract process. When it is fun, the pleasure is wholly different from the pleasure of drawing. With drawing, I am acutely aware of creating something on a sheet of paper. It is a sensual act, which you cannot say about the act of writing. In fact, I often turn to drawing to recover from the writing.

INTERVIEWER

Writing is so unpleasant and painful?

GRASS

It's a bit like sculpting. With sculpture, you have to work from every side. If you change something here, you have to change something there. Suddenly you change one plane . . . and the sculpture becomes something! There is some music in it. The same can happen with a piece of writing. I can work for days on the first or second or third draft, or on a long sentence, or just one period. I like periods, as you know. I work and I work and it's all right. Everything's in there, but there's something heavy about it. Then I make a few changes, which I don't think are very important, and it works! This is what I understand happiness to be, something like happiness. It lasts for two or three seconds. Then I look ahead to the next period, and it's gone.

INTERVIEWER

To return to poetry for a moment, do poems that you write as parts of novels differ in some way from autonomous ones?

GRASS

At one time I was very old fashioned about writing poetry. I thought that when you have enough good poems, you should go out and look for a publisher, do some drawings and print a book. Then you'd have this

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marvelous volume of poetry, quite isolated, only for lovers of poetry. Then beginning with *From the Diary of a Snail,* I began to put poetry and prose together on the pages of my books. This poetry has a different tone. I don't see any reason to isolate poetry from prose, especially when we have in the German literary tradition such a wonderful mixture of the two genres. I have become increasingly interested in putting poetry between the chapters and using it to define the texture of the prose. Besides, there's the chance that prose readers who have the feeling that "poetry is too heavy for me" will see how much simpler and easier poetry can sometimes be than prose.

INTERVIEWER

How much do English-speaking readers lose by reading your books in English?

GRASS

That's very difficult for me answer—I am not an English reader. But I do try to help out with the translations. When I went over the manuscript of *The Flounder* with my German publisher, I asked for a new contract. It stipulates that once I have finished a manuscript and my translators have studied it, my publisher organizes and pays for a meeting for all of us. We did it first with *The Flounder,* then with *The Meeting at Telgte,* and with *The Rat* too. I think it is a great help. The translators know everything about my books and ask marvelous questions. They know the books even better than I do. This can sometimes be unpleasant for me, because they also find the flaws in the books and tell me about them. The French, Italian and Spanish translators compare notes at these meetings and have found that their collaboration helps all of them bring the books into their own languages. I certainly prefer translations that I can read without being aware that I am reading a translation. In the German language we are lucky to have marvelous

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translations from Russian literature. The Tolstoy and the Dostoyevski translations are perfect—they're really part of German literature. The Shakespeare translations and those of the Romantic authors are full of mistakes, but they too are marvelous. Newer translations of those works have fewer mistakes, perhaps none, but can't be compared to the Friedrich von Schlegel–Ludwig Tieck translations. A literary book, whether it is poetry or a novel, needs a translator who is able to re-create the book within his own language. I try to encourage my translators to do this.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think your novel *Die Rättin* suffered somehow in English because the title had to be *The Rat* and therefore did not convey that it is a female rat? *The She-Rat* would not have sounded right to American ears, and *Rattessa* is out of the question. The reference to a specifically female rat seems so fascinating, whereas the genderless English word 'rat' conjures up everyday images of those ugly beasts that infest the subways.

GRASS

We did not have this word in the German language either. I created it. I always try to encourage my translators to invent. I tell them, "If this word doesn't exist in your language, create it." Actually, for me it has a nice sound, *She-Rat*.

INTERVIEWER

Why *is* the rat in the book a female rat? Is that for erotic, or feminist, or political reasons?

GRASS

In *The Flounder* it's a male. But as I get older I see that I've really given myself over to women. I will not change that. Whether it's a human woman or a rat—a she-rat—it doesn't matter. I get ideas, you see? They make me jump

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and dance, and then I find words and stories, and I begin to lie. It's very important to lie. It makes no sense for me to lie to a man—to sit with a man, together, telling lies—but with a woman!

INTERVIEWER

So many of your books, like *The Rat*, *The Flounder, From the Diary of a Snail* or *Dog Years*, center on an animal. Is there some special reason for that?

GRASS

Perhaps. I have always felt we speak too much about human beings. This world is crowded with humans, but also with animals, birds, fish and insects. They were here before we were and they will still be here should the day come when there are no more human beings. There is one difference between us: in our museums we have the bones of the dinosaurs, enormous animals that lived for many millions of years. And when they died, they died in a very clean way. No poison at all. Their bones are very clean. We can see them. This will not happen with human beings. When we die there will be a terrible breath of poison. We must learn that we are not alone on the Earth. The Bible teaches a bad lesson when it says that man has dominion over the fish, the fowl, the cattle and every creeping thing. We have tried to conquer the Earth, with poor results.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever learned from criticism?

GRASS

Although I like to think I am a good pupil, critics are not usually very good teachers. Yet there was one period, which I sometimes miss, when I learned from critics. It was the period of Group 47. We read aloud from manuscripts and discussed them. That's where I learned to discuss a text and give reasons for my opinions, rather

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than just saying, "I like that." The critique came spontaneously. The authors would discuss craft, how to write a book, that sort of thing. As for the critics, they had their own expectations as to how an author should write. This mixture of critics and authors was altogether a good experience for me, and a lesson. In fact, that period was important for postwar German literature in general. There was so much confusion after the war, especially in literary circles, because the generation that grew up during the war—my generation—was either uneducated or miseducated. The language was tainted. The significant authors had emigrated. No one expected anything of German literature. The annual meetings of Group 47 provided a context for us from which German literature could re-emerge. Many German authors of my generation were marked by Group 47, although some don't admit it.

INTERVIEWER

What about criticism published, say, in magazines or newspapers or books? Did that ever affect you?

GRASS

No. But I learned from other authors. Alfred Döblin had such an effect on me that I wrote an essay on him entitled, "On My Teacher Döblin." You can learn from Döblin without the risk of imitating him. For me, he was much more important than Thomas Mann. Döblin's novels are not as symmetrical, not as classically formed as Mann's, and the risks he took were greater. His books are rich, open, full of ideas. I'm sorry that in both America and Germany he is known almost exclusively for *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. But I am still learning, and there are many others who have taught me.

INTERVIEWER

What about American authors?

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GRASS

Melville has always been my favorite. And I've very much enjoyed reading William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe and John Dos Passos. There is no one like Dos Passos—with his marvelous depictions of the masses—writing in America now. I miss the epic dimension that once existed in American literature; it has become over-intellectualized.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of the movie version of *The Tin Drum*?

GRASS

Schlöndorff made a good film, even though he didn't follow the literary form of the book. Perhaps that was necessary, because the point of view of Oskar—who tells his story by constantly jumping from one time period to another—would make a very complicated film. Schlöndorff did something very simple. He just tells the story on one line. There are, of course, whole sections that Schlöndorff cut from the movie version. I miss some of those. And there are aspects of the film I don't like much at all. The short scenes in the Catholic church don't quite work because Schlöndorff doesn't understand anything about Catholicism. He is really a German Protestant, and the Catholic church in the movie looks like a Protestant church that happens to have a confessional in it. But this is one small detail. Altogether, and with the help of the young boy who played Oskar, I think it's a good film.

INTERVIEWER

You have a special interest in the grotesque—I am thinking especially of the famous scene with the eels squirming out of the horse's head in *The Tin Drum*. Where does that come from?

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GRASS

That comes from me. I have never understood why this passage, which is six pages long, is so disturbing. It is a piece of fantastical reality, which I wrote just the same way I go about writing any other detail. But the death and sexuality that are evoked by that image have generated an enormous disgust in people.

INTERVIEWER

What impact has the reunification of Germany had on German cultural life?

GRASS

Nobody listened to the German artists and writers that spoke out against it. Unfortunately the majority of intellectuals did not enter into the discussion, whether for reasons of laziness or apathy I don't know. Early on, the former chancellor, Willy Brandt, pronounced that the train to German unity had left the station and no one could stop it. An unreflective mass enthusiasm took over. That idiotic metaphor was taken as the truth; it ensured that no one thought about how badly this would damage East German culture, not to mention their economy. No, I do not wish to ride a train that cannot be steered and does not respond to warning signals. I have remained standing on the platform.

INTERVIEWER

How do you react to the sharp criticism you have endured from the German press for your views on reunification?

GRASS

Oh, I am used to that! It doesn't affect my position. Reunification has been carried out in a manner which violates our basic law. A new constitution should have been drafted when the divided German states came to-

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gether again—a constitution appropriate to the problems of a united Germany. We did not get a new constitution. What happened instead was that all the East German states were annexed to West Germany. This was done using a sort of a loophole, an article of the constitution which was intended to enable individual German states to become part of West Germany. It also grants the right of West German citizenship to ethnic Germans, such as defectors from the East. It's a real problem because not everything about East Germany was corrupt, just the government. And now everything East German—including their schools, their art, their culture—is going to be tossed out or suppressed. It has been stigmatized; that entire part of German culture will vanish.

INTERVIEWER

German unification is the kind of historical event that you frequently take up in your books. When you write about such situations, do you attempt to give a "true" historical narrative? How do fictional histories like yours complement the history we read in textbooks and newspapers?

GRASS

History is more than the news. I have concerned myself particularly with the progression of historical events in two books, *The Meeting at Telgte* and *The Flounder*. In *The Flounder*, it's the story of the historical development of human nourishment. There's not a great deal of material on that subject: we usually call only those things "history" that have to do with war, peace, political oppression or party politics. The process of nourishment and human nutrition is a central question, especially important now, when starvation and the population explosion go hand in hand in the third world. Anyway, I had to invent the documentation for this history, and decided upon using a fairy tale as the guiding metaphor. Fairy tales generally speak the truth, encapsulating the essence

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of our experiences, dreams, wishes, and our sense of being lost in the world. In this way they are truer than many facts.

INTERVIEWER

What about your characters?

GRASS

Literary characters, and especially the protagonist who must carry a book, are combinations of many different people, ideas, experiences, all bundled together. As a writer of prose you have to create, invent characters—some you like and others you don't. You can only do it successfully if you can get inside these people. If I don't understand my own creations from the inside, they will be paper figures, nothing more.

INTERVIEWER

They frequently make reappearences in several different books; I'm thinking again of Tulla, Ilsebill, Oskar, and his grandmother Anna, for example. I get the impression that these characters are all members of a larger fictive world that you have only just begun to document in your novels. Do you ever think of them as having an independent existence?

GRASS

When I begin a book I develop sketches of several different characters. As my work on the book progresses, these fictive characters often begin to live their own lives. For example, in *The Rat*, I had never planned to reintroduce Mr. Matzerath as a sixty-year-old man. But he presented himself to me, kept asking to be included, saying, "I am still here; this is also my story." He wanted to get into the book. I have often found that over the course of years, these invented people begin to make demands, contradict me, or even refuse to allow themselves to be used. One is well advised to take heed of

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these people now and then. Of course, one must also listen to one's self. It becomes a kind of dialogue, sometimes a very heated one. It is cooperation.

INTERVIEWER

Why is the character Tulla Pokriefke at the center of so many of your books?

GRASS

Her character is so difficult and full of contradictions. I was very much touched when I wrote those books. I can't explain her. If I did, there would be an explanation. I hate explanations! I invite you to make your own picture. In Germany the high-school kids come to school and what they want is to read a good story, or a book with a redhead in it! But that's not allowed. Instead they are instructed to interpret every poem, every page, to discover what the poet is saying. This has nothing to do with art. You can explain a technical thing and its function, but a picture or a poem or a story or a novel has so many possibilities. Every reader creates a poem over again. That's the reason I hate interpretations and explanations. Still, I'm very glad that you're still in touch with Tulla Pokriefke.

INTERVIEWER

Your books are often told from many points of view. In *The Tin Drum,* Oskar speaks from the first person and the third person. In *Dog Years,* the narrative switches from second to third person. One could go on. How does this technique help you to present your view of the world?

GRASS

One must always seek out fresh perspectives. For example, Oskar Matzerath. A dwarf—a child even in adulthood—his size and his passivity make him a perfect vehicle for many different perspectives. He has delusions of

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grandeur, and that is why he sometimes speaks of himself in the third person, just as young children sometimes do. It is part of his self-glorification. It is like the royal We, and in the spirit of de Gaulle, saying, "moi, de Gaulle . . ." These are all narrative postures that provide distance. In *Dog Years,* there are three perspectives, with the role of the dog different in each. The dog is a point of refraction.

INTERVIEWER

How have your interests changed and your style developed over the course of your career?

GRASS

My first three major books, *The Tin Drum*, *Dog Years*, and the novella, *Cat and Mouse,* represent one period—the sixties. The German experience of World War II is central to all three books, which together make up the Danzig trilogy. At that time I felt especially compelled to deal with the Nazi era in my writing, to work through its causes and ramifications. A few years later, I wrote *From the Diary of a Snail,* which also deals with the war, but was a real departure in terms of my prose style and form. The action takes place in three different epochs: the past (World War II), the present (1969 in Germany, when I began work on the book) and the future (represented by my children). In my head and in the book all these time periods are jumbled together. I discovered that the verb tenses taught in grammar school—past, present and future—are not so simple in real life. Every time I think about the future, my knowledge of the past and the present are there, affecting what I call "future." And sentences that were said yesterday may not really be past and done with—perhaps *they* will have a future. Mentally, we are not restricted to chronology—we are aware of many different times at once, as if they were one. As a writer, I have to perceive this overlapping of times and tenses and be able to present it. These temporal themes have

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become increasingly important in my work. *Headbirths, or the Germans are Dying Out* is really narrated from a new, invented time, which I call *Vergegenkunft*. It's an amalgam of the words "past," "present," and "future." In German, you can run words together to form compounds. *Ver-* comes from *Vergangenheit*, which means past. *Gegen-* from *Gegenwart*, which means present, and *-kunft* from *Zukunft*, the word for "future." This new, mixed-up time is also central to *The Flounder.* In that book the narrator has been reincarnated over and over again throughout time, and his many different biographies provide new perspectives, each in its own present tense. To write a book from the perspectives of so many different eras, looking back from the present and in touch with things to come, I thought I would need a new form. But the novel is such an open form, that I found I could shift forms, from poetry to prose, within it.

INTERVIEWER

In *From the Diary of a Snail*, you combine contemporary politics with a fictionalized account of what befell the Jewish community of Danzig in the Second World War. Did you know that the speechwriting and electioneering you did for Willy Brandt in 1969 would become material for a book?

GRASS

I had no other choice but to go on that election campaign, book or not. Born in 1927, in Germany, I was twelve years old when the war started and seventeen years old when it was over. I am overloaded with this German past. I'm not the only one; there are other authors who feel this. If I had been a Swedish or a Swiss author I might have played around much more, told a few jokes and all that. That hasn't been possible; given my background, I have had no other choice. In the fifties and the sixties, the Adenauer period, politicians didn't

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like to speak about the past, or if they did speak about it, they made it out to be a demonic period in our history when devils had betrayed the pitiful, helpless German people. They told bloody lies. It has been very important to tell the younger generation how it really happened, that it happened in daylight, and very slowly and methodically. At that time, anyone could have looked and seen what was going on. One of the best things we have after forty years of the Federal Republic is that we can talk about the Nazi period. And postwar literature played an important part in bringing that about.

INTERVIEWER

The Diary of a Snail begins, "Dear children." This is an appeal to the entire generation that grew up after the war, but you are also addressing your own children.

GRASS

I wanted to explain how the transgression of genocide came about. Born after the war, my children had a father who drove off to campaign and give speeches on Monday morning and did not come back again until the following Saturday. They asked, "Why do you do this, why are you constantly away from us?" I tried to make it clear to them, not only verbally, but in what I wrote. The incumbent chancellor at that time, Kurt Georg Kiesinger, had been a Nazi during the war. So I was not only campaigning for a new German chancellor, but also against the Nazi past. In my book I didn't want to stick merely to abstract numbers—"so and so many Jews were murdered." Six million is an incomprehensible number. I wanted it to have a more physical impact. So I chose as the thread to my story the history of the Danzig synagogue, which stood in that city for many centuries until it was destroyed during the war by the Nazis—Germans. I wanted to document the truth of what happened there. In the final scene of the book I relate this to the present: I write about my preparations for a lecture given in

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honor of Albrecht Dürer's three hundredth birthday. The chapter is a melancholy reflection on Dürer's engraving "Melencholia I" and the effect melancholy has had on human history. I imagine that a culture-wide state of melancholy would be the correct attitude for Germans to have toward the Holocaust. Repentant and mournful, it would be informed by some insight about the causes of the Holocaust, which would carry over to our times as a lesson.

INTERVIEWER

This is typical of so many of your books, focusing on some aspect of wretchedness in the current world situation and the horrors that seem to lie ahead. Do you mean to teach, to warn or to incite your readers to some kind of action?

GRASS

Simply, I do not want to deceive them. I want to present the situation they are in, or one they may look forward to. People are disconsolate, not because everything is so awful but because we as human beings have it in our hands to change things, but don't. Our problems are caused by us, determined by us, and it behooves us to solve them.

INTERVIEWER

Your activism extends to environmental as well as political issues, and you have incorporated this into your work.

GRASS

In the past few years I have traveled a great deal, in Germany and other places. I have seen and drawn dying, poisoned worlds. I published a book of drawings called *Death of Wood* about one such world, on the border between the Federal Republic of Germany and what was then still the German Democratic Republic. There, well

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in advance of the political union, a reunification of Germany occurred in the form of dying forests. This is also true of the mountain range on the border of West Germany and Czechoslovakia. It looks as if a slaughter had taken place. I drew what I saw there. The pictures have brief, pregnant titles that are intended more as commentary than description, and there is an afterword. With this kind of subject matter, drawing has an equal or greater weight than the writing.

INTERVIEWER

Do you believe that literature has sufficient power to illuminate the political realities of an age? Did you go into politics because as a citizen you felt you could do more than what you could as a writer?

GRASS

I don't think politics should be left to the parties; that would be dangerous. There are so many seminars and conferences on the subject "Can Literature Change the World"! I think literature has the power to effect change. So does art. We've changed our habits of seeing as a result of modern art, in ways of which we are barely aware. Inventions like cubism have provided us with new powers of vision. James Joyce's introduction of the interior monologue in *Ulysses* has affected the complexity of our understanding of existence. It's just that the changes that literature can affect are not measurable. The intercourse between a book and its reader is peaceful, anonymous.

To what extent have books changed people? We don't know much about this. I can only answer that books have been decisive for me. When I was young, after the war, one of the many books that were important for me was that little volume by Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The famous, mythological hero who is sentenced to roll a stone up a mountain, which inevitably rolls back down to the bottom—traditionally a genuinely tragic figure—was

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newly interpreted for me by Camus as being *happy* in his fate. The continuous, futile-seeming repetition of rolling the stone up the mountain is actually the satisfying act of his existence. He would be unhappy if someone took the stone away from him. That had a great influence on me. I don't believe in an end goal; I don't think the stone will ever remain at the top of the mountain. We can take this myth to be a positive depiction of the human condition, even though it stands in opposition to every form of idealism, including German idealism, and to every ideology. Every western ideology promises some ultimate goal: a happy, a just or a peaceful society. I don't believe in that. We are things in flux. It may be that the stone always slides away from us and must be rolled back up again, but it's something we must do: the stone belongs to us.

INTERVIEWER

So how do you envision man's future?

GRASS

As long as we are needed, there will be some sort of future. I can't tell you much about it in one word. I don't want to give an answer to this in one word. I have written a book, *The Rat*, *The She-Rat*, *Rattessa*. What else do you want? It is a long answer to your question.

—**Elizabeth Gaffney**
John Simon

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Two Poems by Campbell McGrath

Wheatfield Under Clouded Sky

Suppose Gauguin had never seen Tahiti. Suppose the
beche-de-mer and sandalwood trade had not
materialized
and the Polynesian gods held fast in the fruit of Nuku
Hiva and the milk-and-honey waters of Eiao.
Suppose that Europe during whichever century of its
rise toward science had not lost faith in the soul.
Suppose the need for conquest had turned inward, as
a hunger after clarity, a seige of the hidden fortress.
Suppose Gauguin had come instead to America.
Suppose he left New York and traveled west by
train
to the silver fields around Carson City where the
water-shaped, salt- and heart-colored rocks
appeased the painter's sensibility and the ghost-veined
filaments called his banker's soul to roost.
Suppose he died there, in the collapse of his
hand-tunneled mine shaft, buried beneath the
rubble of desire.
Suppose we take Van Gogh as our model. Suppose
we imagine him alone in the Dakotas,
sketching wild flowers and the sod huts of immigrants
as he wanders, subsisting on bulbs and tubers,
an itinerant prairie mystic, like Johnny Appleseed.
Suppose what consumes him is nothing so obvious
as crows
or starlight, steeples, cypresses, ghettos, absinthe,
epilepsy, reapers or sowers or gleaners,
but is, like color, as absolute and bodiless as the far
horizon, a journey toward purity of vision.

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Suppose the pattern of wind in the grass could signify
a deeper restlessness or the cries
of land-locked gulls bespoke the democratic nature of
our solitude.
Suppose the troubled clouds themselves were
harbingers. Suppose the veil could be lifted.

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Hemingway Dines on Boiled Shrimp and Beer

I'm the original two-hearted brawler.
I gnaw the scrawny heads from prawns,
pummel those mute translucent crustaceans,
wingless hummingbirds, salt-water spawned.
As the Catalonians do, I eat the eyes at once.
My brawny palms flatten their mainstays.
I pop the shells with my thumbs, then crunch.

Just watch me as I swagger and sprawl,
spice-mad and sated, then dabble in lager
before I go strolling for stronger waters
down to Sloppy Joe's. My stride as I stagger
shivers the islands, my fingers troll a thousand keys.
My appetite shakes the rock of the nation.
The force of my miction makes the mighty Gulf Stream.

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Two Poems by David Bottoms

Snake on the Etowah

Kicking through woods and fields, I'd spooked several
and once stepped on a coachwhip among gravestones,
at least one garter curled like a bow
under ivy in my yard.
Once I even woke on the hazy bank of a lake,
wiped dew from my eyes and found
on my ankle
a cottonmouth draped like a bootlace.

I thought I knew how beauty could poison
a moment with fear,
but wading that low river, feet wide on rocks—
my rod hung on the backswing, my jitterbug
snagged on the sun—
I felt something brush my thigh.
The bronze spoon of a copperhead drifted
between my legs.

Out came the little tongue reaching
in two directions,
the head following upriver,
following down, then a wide undulation of tail,
a buff and copper swish, the river easing
around it in a quivering V,
while inside my shudder
it slipped out—
spiny, cool, just below
the surface, sidling against the current.

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Living Lingerie: In the Modeling Parlor

The sign itself is shab you need, blue neon
half-circling
a curvy silhouette. And rain spilling the gutters
seems the perfect stage effect.
Any minute the building could crumble
like your favorite fantasy.

But the dreadlocked woman, who touches you only
with her eyes, waits on the sofa
in the picture window,
crossing her legs on faded floral, a postcard
in the neon tinting the glass.

Down the hall to a room she guides you.
A tape in the boom box, and the bass of reggae
weaves around her hips. A lamp
dulls a wall mirror and her blush flares.
She looks younger than you remember,
and distracted you imagine
what she might go home to—
a boyfriend asleep
on the sofa? or the snore of a window fan,
cold dinner in the fridge? About being alone
she may know as much as you.

Only for a moment are you ashamed
of not asking—that comes later, with single-malt
nightcaps. She turns in the mirror
to unbutton her dress,
her company now an ideal loneliness.

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Tina Barr

Twelve Dancing Princesses

for Henri

Now I am flying a land
compressed below me, a realm,
I alight and descend to:
Long Island as it was in the cold
night of October we swept through Laurel
Hollow in our acetate gowns, pink sheened,
wearing the masks of princesses,
smelling hard plastic as we breathed.
Elastic pinned our ears; the eyeholes slid.

My sister dragged her two-handled bag
heavy with candy; her trailing skirt swept
white pebbles we crunched under slippers.
Lucy and Mary and Alisa and I spied,
as the front door opened on a courtyard,
a silver bowl of Tootsie Rolls, fireballs,
licorice and coins in gold foil.
I hung back on the edge of an oriental,
the flat paint of the staircase immaculate.

A lady bent forward with a basket
spilling apples and popcorn balls;
white puffs adhered in sugar syrup,
inside crinkled cellophane, red or blue or green.
Home, we dumped out the candy.
Riggs and Laurie and I, sorting by color,
would barter jujubes for chocolate babies
arranging boxes of mints and the pastel coins
of Necco disks, trading my brother the black

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licorice. And on the bedroom carpet,
deep red, embedded, flecked with lint,
we'd heated up the cooker and poured
liquid plastic, monster green or black,
in shallow molds like muffin tins,
then tweezed the metal plates onto hot beds
and brought from the cooled iron:
spiders, geckos, frogs, and salamanders, stiff
as licorice, picked from their molds with pins.

Before I slept, having read *The Red Fairy Book,*
I danced in the ballroom which housed kindergarten,
my ankles bound in pink satin ribbon,
toes boxed in hard-backed satin; on point,
through French windows I pirouetted and leapt
over ivy and pachysandra. At the pond
willow fronds hung silver. In the little boat
my tutu puffed out its stiff honeycombed net
at my hips, and Timmy, from sixth, rowed invisible.

In the morning we ran down where the grass
froze so crisp it broke beneath our penny loafers—
green pick-up-sticks, stiff with rime.
I found *Soul on Ice,* pages warped and stuck,
and took it. The yellow bus climbed
past the greenhouse and the gatehouse
to the front of red brick. Beside the clipped
boxwood I mounted. Above kindergarten's domed
ceiling
upstairs in the round science room a balcony

overlooked magnolias and a jungle gym.
In Science wobbled orbits and film strips
of the desert. Snakes ate and chipmunks
knelt to acorns and nibbled, celluloid-large,
as wide onscreen as the flung belly-struggle
of the rattler sidewinding: a leash of energy,
a kick, a whip. So I grew up and went west
and climbed a rockface's rotten rock; it came off
in my hands; in my hands nothing with which

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to mark a path, neither stones, nor grain, nor rags
to be wound into torches coming back
from the hockey field up the stairs past
the boxwood talking to Mary, swinging my stick.
Whatever could I take, starting from there,
at the old track of the place before the new road
was laid, past the Cutters' fields, stands of pine,
and paddocks, down the old approach through laurel,
past rhododendrons straight in,

where the coaches used to come.
I must have set out from there past
the rusting fire engine and the swings,
twelve-foot spikes at the gate, spear-points once
blooded in gold leaf. Paint-peels,
flaked under my fingernails, sandpapered rust.
Ahead: a fox, a runaway, a woman broken.
Carrying over my shoulder a bundle slung
on the end of a stick. Inside me, a prince.

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Stephen Dunn

Good Talk

Something to drink helps, of course,
  and humor must live
even on that dark corner where once

your life was threatened. Something in the voice,
  in the telling,
must signal *I am safe now and am trying*

to please you, the wink not in the eye
  but in the phrase, the tone.
And seriousness must be taken for granted

like the hard work that makes the dinner party
  feel effortless.
Let at least one listener be contrary,

another famous for his honest, delayed assent,
  a traveler
of the same boulevards and alleys,

demanding you either be charming or exact.
  It will be
his turn soon, or hers, maybe something about

the pointless ferocities of intellectual life
  told from the inside,
which reminds everyone of a story.

Let all the laughter be perfectly pitched.
  And the newcomer,
whose fine silence you've convinced yourself

is intelligence, has just taken a breath.
  You'll not be forgiven
for speaking to her privately.

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Two Poems by Jonathan Aaron

Dance Mania

In 1027, not far from Bernburg,
eighteen peasants were seized
by a common delusion.
Holding hands, they circled for hours
in a churchyard, haunted by visions,
spirits whose names they called in terror or welcome,
until an angry priest cast a spell on them
for disrupting his Christmas service,
and they sank in the frozen earth
up to their knees. In 1227
on a road to Darmstadt, scores of children
danced and jumped in a shared delirium.
Some saw devils, others the Savior enthroned
in the open heavens. Those who survived
remained palsied for the rest of their days.
And in 1278, two hundred fanatics raved on a bridge
that spanned the Mosel near Utrecht.
A cleric passed, carrying the host
to a devout parishioner, the bridge collapsed,
and the maniacs were swept away.
A hundred years later, in concert with
the Great Mortality, armies of dancers
roved in contortions all over Europe.
The clergy found them immune to exorcism,
gave in to their wishes and issued
decrees banning all but square-toed shoes,
the zealots having declared they hated
pointed ones. They disliked even more
the color red, suggesting
a connection between their malady

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and the condition of certain infuriated
animals. Most of all, they could not endure
the sight of people weeping.
The Swiss doctor Paracelsus was the first to call
the Church's theories of enchantment
nonsensical gossip. Human life is inseparable
from the life of the universe, he said.
Anybody's mortal clay is an extract
of all beings previously created. Illness
can be traced, he said,
to the failure of the Archaeus, a force
residing in the stomach and whose function
is to harmonize the mystic elements (salt,
sulphur, mercury) on which vitality depends.
He advocated direct measures, proposed remedies
fitting the degree of the affliction.
A patient could make a wax doll of himself,
invest his sins and blasphemies within the manikin,
then burn it with no further ceremony.
He could subject himself to a cure of ice-water baths,
or submit to starvation in solitary confinement.
Noted for his arrogance, vanity
and choler (his real name was Theophrastus Bombast
von Hohenheim), Paracelsus made enemies.
They discovered he held no academic degree
and caused him to be banished from Basel,
to become a wanderer who would die mysteriously in
Salzburg
in 1541. After a drunken orgy, said one report.
The victim of thugs hired by jealous apothecaries,
said another. And the dance mania
made its own way through time to survive
among us, as untouched as ever by the wisdom of
science.
Think of the strange, magnetic sleep
whole populations fall into every day,
in gymnasiums full of pounding darkness,

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in the ballrooms of exclusive hotels,
on verandahs overlooking the ocean and played upon
by moonlight, in backyards, on the perfect lawns
of great estates, on city rooftops, in any brief field
the passing tourist sees as empty—
how many millions of us now, the living
and the dead, hand in hand as always,
approaching the brink of the millennium.

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Sufficiency

Dozens of burning, fish-shaped clouds dove for the horizon,
determined to make more of an already explosive sunset.

The sea gave the shore another hearty slap on the back.
Crickets started singing in the dry grass beyond the wide-open door.

The day's last excursion boat glided past the window, white as a gull.
We were about to sit down around the kitchen table

and serve ourselves from a hot bowl those little red potatoes
the whole island survived on during the war.

Bréhat (Côtes du Nord)

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Walter Griffin

The Bones of Montgomery Clift

Righted, they would form
a somnambulistic stance in the

stoop-shouldered dark; shuffling
in the absence of skin stretched

across those Greek features,
the curve of lip disappeared, the nervous

eyes gone the way of rats.
Slack-jawed, his lines would fall

upon the fleshless air
then slide down the throats of trees,

their tops bent like his walk
slouching across the Late Show screen

with sockets full of a hollow dark
only that perfect corpse knows.

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Two Poems by Yves Bonnefoy

A Summer's Night

I

You were sculpted on a prow,
Time wore you away as the foam might have done,
It closed your eyes one stormy night,
Stained with salt your half-bare breasts.

O saint, whose charred hands are recolored
By the adoration of some new flowers,
Sanctuary for the sparse, the fleeting,
At the far end of rust-sown fields,

What sleep in your arched neck,
What shade in the dry leaves on the flagstones!
One could call this our room of a year gone by,
The same bed, but the blinds drawn shut.

II

And there, among the field-flowers, the wax ones
Are no less moving, brightly painted
According to the whims of hope that still dreams
Even where memory has faded.

And the unbeliever lingering near them,
He too picks up the glass crucible,
Raises it irrepressibly before the image,
Recreating thus the miracle of fire,

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Then sets it down, infinite, and continues on his way,
Having loved the sign for lack of meaning,
What will soon blacken in this flame, he wonders,
Which is the word missing from my voice?

Yet all is so luminous, at nightfall,
Why does one arch in every life
Hang lower, and the water it enthralls crash more fiercely,
Beneath the resonant vault?

III

And what an enigma, this place where things are
Evidence, almost, in spite of death!
One would think there was being here, so dim
Can the light grow without ceasing to shine.

And it's like the sound of voices
Heard at evening on still water
Traveling faster than a wave made by a stone,
We can no longer tell the distant from the near.

Who's speaking there, so close to us and yet invisible?
Who's walking there, faceless in the dazzling light?
This is how the gods, long ago, would come to children
Tossing pebbles in the water as evening fell.

IV

You move on, your hand resting on the boat's flank grazes the water.
The oarsmen are faceless now.
In the sky, the Bear has entered the bright foliage,
The Virgin's dress has torn.

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Are we no more than a tree that caught fire
In the time unaware of itself?
The lightning knocks now and then against the leaves
And words are embers lying dormant

In the elbow of two branches. Then the tree starts to
burn,
And the one next to it perhaps. But the sky
Has its own, another, light. And the cycle
Of the stars' indifference hasn't ended.

V

You move on, and it still seems to you
That the river of moonlight on the trees is widening.
Could it be that a life is quickening
In the forest's mirror where worlds are reflected?

No—it's the stars and branches commingling,
And dreams and paths. Night is a glistening stone
That blocks the river's flow,
It's four A.M. and day's already breaking.

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The Task of Hope

It's dawn. Has this lamp finished, then,
Its task of hope, hand resting
In the mirror fogged up over the fever
Of the man who kept vigil, unable to die?

But he never did extinguish it,
It burns for him still, despite the sky.
Swallows cry out their souls to your frosted window
panes,
O morning sleeper, another river's boat.

—translated from the French
by Lisa Sapinkopf

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An Airman's Good-bye

Rick DeMarinis

The Dakemans were untidy degenerates, including their children and pets, according to Mom. "Some people make their pets and children as trashy as they are," she said, her voice hushed discreetly. "It's a well-known fact of life." She used me—in my crisp blue Air Force uniform complete with Expert Marksman medal and Good Conduct ribbon—and our dog Pershing, as counter-examples. Pershing was a joyless yellow Labrador. We kept him tied to the mulberry tree in our front yard. He never barked or strained at his rope when cars, or people on foot, passed by. He was too intelligent, too dignified, to be ruled by the ordinary chaotic dog emotions. Several of the undisciplined Dakeman dogs would often come over to visit Pershing, and Pershing would allow himself to be sniffed, nipped, teased, and sometimes mounted, without protest, until Mom rapped the window hard enough to make the uninhibited Dakeman mongrels realize her anger, and the motley gang of dogs would chase each other back to the house across the street which looked like it had been plucked up out of

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some 1930s dust-bowl state by a tornado and deposited twenty years later in our clean and tidy, middle-class, scrupulously manicured, east San Diego neighborhood.

I had just gotten back home after twelve weeks of basic training at Parks Air Force base outside of Oakland. I caught the flu in the damp northern California climate and had lost twenty pounds. I went into the Air Force skinny—six feet tall and one hundred and sixty pounds—and now, at one hundred and forty pounds, I looked like I'd just been liberated from a Nazi concentration camp. Still dizzy and weak, I spent my evenings watching TV and listening to Mom whisper complaints, as if she wasn't in her own house and needed to be secretive. She complained about the Dakemans, about the rising price of meat, and, with tight-lipped bitterness, about Dad's boss who kept him on the road six to eight months a year. I didn't mind listening to her. It was better than listening to a drill instructor scream a long list of your shortcomings into your face. And besides, the tedium I had to put up with was more than compensated for by her abundant, nonstop cooking.

"You need good, clean food, Miles," she said. "I'm sure they fed you nothing but filth at the training base." I ate the equivalent of six meals a day, hoping to put some bulk on my bones. My hair hadn't grown in yet, and when I looked at myself in the full-length mirror it seemed I was all nose and ears. The thought of looking up my old high school friends depressed me. They used to call me Nose-With-Legs—in just that way, like the title of a painting, as if I were a walking Picasso—and that's exactly what I looked like at one hundred and forty pounds.

Mom's specialty was meatloaf. I could eat six or seven slices of meatloaf at one sitting, along with a huge baked Idaho potato buried in sour cream, two or three steamed vegetables blanketed by a lava of yellow sauce, a quart of milk, and a hot wedge of apple or cherry pie for dessert. I was determined to get back the weight I'd lost

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before I had to report to Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi for airborne radar training, and I would eat until a comfortable pain tightened my belly. Mom, a short, fat woman and a big eater herself, was delighted with my performance at the table. She liked her men beefy as lumberjacks. All her brothers had been lumberjacks in the forests of Oregon and Northern California—big-bellied, thick-wristed, hearty men with fine, personal habits and positive outlooks on life, and Dad was a two-hundred-and-eighty pound medical supplies salesman who loved Mom's food so much he'd make small whimpering sounds as he ate. She connected my vulnerability to disease to my scrawniness, and now I was scrawnier than ever. She also saw evidence of a negative outlook in me, but this, too, she believed, was a consequence of poor nutrition, the flu, and the influence of the riffraff who, she believed, joined the military only to improve their pathetic circumstances.

In the mornings, after my huge breakfast had time to settle, I'd go down into the basement and lift weights for an hour or so, tape-measure my arms, chest, and legs for signs of new bulk, then come upstairs to shower. I'd watch TV until early afternoon with a plate of meatloaf or roast beef sandwiches, then, in the evening, while Mom was getting supper ready, I'd sit out on the front porch and talk to Pershing. Pershing liked to be talked to. He would sit attentively on his haunches and study me with his big liquid eyes as I told him stories about life at Parks Air Force Base.

I was telling Pershing how two DI's had beat up a half-retarded kid for not changing his underwear often enough when a loud bang from across the street startled us both. This was normal; you expected noises of all sorts from the Dakeman house. A thud, a bang or a scream, and a door would pop open and dogs or children would come flying out barking, crying or laughing, or issuing blood threats. Mr. Dakeman was usually out of work, but when he did work he made good money. I think he was

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a welder or boilermaker, and he would leave the family for weeks at a time to work in such exotic places as Tulsa, Oklahoma or Galveston, Texas. Sometimes he was home for half the year or more, and toward the end of one of these forced domestications, he would become short-tempered, often relieving his frustration or boredom with bouts of mind-numbing drinking.

This was one of those stretches of time when Mr. Dakeman was between jobs. The soft explosion I'd heard had to do with Nola Dakeman, his teenaged daughter. Nola came flying out of the house, slamming the door behind her, and cursing tearfully. At seventeen, she was a tall, long-armed girl with crisp black hair cut Cleopatra style, and absolutely no sign of breasts. After she calmed down, she started walking up the street backwards, her hands shoved into her pockets, muttering to herself and scowling at the house she'd left. She was barefoot, and wearing cutoff Levis and a yellow football jersey with the number 99 on it in big blue letters. It belonged to her brother, Eldon, an awkward giant of subnormal intelligence who'd played tackle on the varsity football team in his freshman year solely because of his size. He dropped out of school a few months short of graduation to join the navy. Eldon Dakeman was the object of a lot of jokes among my friends, none of which was repeated to his face.

When Nola saw me watching her, she turned quickly and started walking normally, and then, as if seized by a better idea, she spun around and waved. I swung my arm in a casual arc. Pershing raised his sad eyebrows expectantly. Nola smiled. "Hey, *Miles,* you're back home," she said.

"Affirmative," I said, military style.

She crossed the street. She was wearing makeup, a lot of it. The face she had painted on herself was pretty. I never thought of her as pretty—she was just a lanky Dakeman kid across the street, but three months away from home gave me a fresh perspective.

"So, are you a big jet *pi*-lot or something?" she asked,

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putting one long narrow foot on the first step of our porch, stretching her other leg behind her. Her calves rounded out nicely as they flexed; her haunches curved sleek as albino seals out of her skintight cutoffs.

"Negative," I said. "I just finished basic training. I'm going to Mississippi next week to study at the radar school."

"Eldon's not in the navy any more," she said.

"How come?" I asked. All the lights were on in the Dakeman house, even though it was still light outside. I could hear Mr. Dakeman yelling at someone, probably his wife, a slender, gray woman who always seemed distracted, as if she were trying to remember something important and couldn't go on with the next thing she had to do until she recalled it. I saw Mr. Dakeman drag her across the yard once by her wrist, pulling her into the house so hard that she swung from side to side like a kite being yanked out of a windy sky by force.

"He got kicked out," Nola said. "He did something weird, I think."

That didn't surprise me. Once during a scrimmage, Eldon pulled down his pants far enough so that his gigantic, ghostly-white butt was visible to the backfield. Mooning his own backfield was his idea of sophisticated humor. I was the third string quarterback getting a chance to work with the starting backfield. We were in a T-formation set, and I was too busy staring over the center at a pair of growling linebackers to notice Eldon at his left tackle spot. When I turned to hand the ball off to Joey Butterfield, the fullback, Joey wasn't there. I got creamed and fumbled the ball. Joey was on his back, laughing hysterically. I was face down and writhing in the grass, taking late hits even though the wind was knocked out of me and Coach Stuckey was blowing his whistle so hard it hurt my ears even under the insulating pile of bodies. Coach Stuckey made the entire football team take ten laps after scrimmaging for two more hours because of our attitude problem. We wanted to kill Eldon, but at six feet six inches and two hundred and

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twenty-nine pounds, he was easy to forgive. It was hard to believe all this had happened just the previous fall. High school seemed like a century ago.

"What did he do?" I asked.

"I don't know. He won't say. I think he *wanted* to get kicked out though. He hated it." She sat down on the first step of the porch, the back of her head level with my knee.

"Too bad," I said, trying to imagine hulking Eldon in a tight-fitting sailor's uniform.

Nola nudged Pershing's flank with her naked toes. "Hi Pershing," she said. "Hi you silly old zombie." She put her hand out, and Pershing leaned toward it an inch, his eyes melancholy in the waning light. Then Mom cleared her throat. She'd been at the screen door for a while, listening. "Miles," she said, in that soft, confiding voice. "I have your pork chops ready, dear." I left Nola on the porch talking to Pershing and went inside to eat.

Mom gave me free use of her car, a bright yellow 1950 Hudson Hornet. I loved its low-cut lines and power. When you got into it, you stepped down, as if into a private basement apartment. The upholstery was a dark beige plush and the dashboard held big, generous instruments, and a chrome-plated push-button radio. Mom vacuumed it out once a week, as if it were part of her house. The car was clean and it still had a showroom smell to it, even though it was over five years old. Sometimes I'd have her pack a lunch—four sandwiches, pie, thermos full of milk—and I'd drive out to the beach. The surf at La Jolla Shores was perfect for bodysurfing, and I'd spend an entire morning swimming out to where the big waves were breaking and then riding them in. I worked up a terrific appetite doing this, and by noon I was ready to eat my four-sandwich lunch. Then I'd drive around town for a while, looking at the sights, taking the long way home—through Balboa Park, past the zoo and Navy

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hospital, and then out onto the highway that ran through Mission Valley where I'd open the big Hudson up and watch the red speed indicator dance on ninety.

About two weeks before I was scheduled to take the train to Biloxi, Nola Dakeman asked if she could come to the beach with me. In spite of myself, I glanced quickly at the kitchen window of our house knowing that Mom would be squinting out at us and wondering what Nola Dakeman wanted from her clean-cut airman. I told Nola she was welcome to come, but would she meet me on El Cajon Boulevard—four blocks away—in fifteen minutes. She shrugged—probably guessing what was behind my strategy—and said, "Sure."

In the car, she said, "What's the matter, don't you want your Ma to know you're taking me to the beach?"

I glanced over at her, a nervous twitch of a smile trying to sabotage the cool, regulation military expression on my face. She sat close to me, and I realized that she smelled. It was a strong, domestic smell, a mixture of sweat and kitchen odors—the Dakemans were known to fry everything in deep fat: a haze of grease fogged their kitchen day and night—but under this was a rich, tropical smell that was as exotic to me as the air of an equatorial seaport.

By late afternoon I was in love with Nola Dakeman. I didn't realize it until a few days later, but thinking back on our day at the beach I saw that was when it started. After we swam and bodysurfed for a few hours, we came back to the blanket to have some lunch. But I couldn't eat more than one sandwich, and even several hours later the undigested sandwich felt like a twelve-pound shot put in my stomach as I saw again, in my imagination, her water-beaded face, the long strands of her wet black hair pasted to her neck and shoulders, and her electrifying eyes that seemed able to transfer some of their blue voltage into mine.

I lost my appetite. I began to meet Nola out in the street after dark, and the anticipation of these meetings

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was so intense that I had a hard time swallowing my supper. Mom thought I was having a relapse of whatever it was I'd caught in basic training. She wanted to call a doctor, but I begged her not to. "I'll be all right, Mom," I said. "All I need is to rest my stomach a little. I think I've been eating too much. Maybe I have a little indigestion."

She regarded me with a wounded look. Cold tears glazed her eyes. "My food does not cause indigestion," she said, gravely.

I'd go outside when it was dark and give Pershing some leftovers, and then Nola would come out and stroll across the street. We'd talk casually until Mom left her vigil at the kitchen window to watch one of her favorite TV shows. When she was gone, Nola and I would slip around to the side of the house and kiss each other to exhaustion, each grinding kiss lasting minutes.

I loved her smell and would dream about it at night and the dreams eventually became erotically specific. Mom began to regard me with a kind of shy disgust when she changed my bedding. I'd never been in love before. I'd gone steady twice in high school, but that was part of an expected routine. Nola and I met every evening at the same time and would wind up necking heavily either in our side yard, between the house and the garage, or in her backyard.

The Dakeman backyard looked like a graveyard for the Industrial Revolution. The shrubless, grassless yard was strewn with the massive hulks of old arc welding generators, compressors frozen with rust, and gutted prewar cars waiting patiently to be repaired or further cannibalized. Unidentifiable fragments of machines grew out of the sterile soil like exotic, rust-colored wildflowers.

We made love for the first time in the rotting, mushroom-sprouting back seat of a prewar Buick that sat wheel-less in a far corner of the Dakeman yard. It was a passionate, flailing, short-lived attempt, charged with the sort of desperation people who leap from the windows of burning buildings have, but it was the real thing: sex.

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"I love you! Oh dammit, I think I love you!" I said, joyous and amazed. I hugged her hard and rocked her from side to side against the mildewed mohair as disturbed moths banged into my face and neck.

She drew back, putting some distance between us. "It'll be way better next time," she said. It was a thin-lipped declaration of superior knowledge. It was my first time, but it was not Nola's. "It won't be such a great big deal for you next time, Miles."

We took a walk through the neighborhood. The nearly full moon transformed lawns and sidewalks into pewter, and the sparse fronds of the date palms that lined the streets seemed like the motionless wings of astonished angels. As we passed the dark windows of my house, I sensed Mom's unhappy, vigilant eyes watching us. I put my arm around Nola's bony shoulders. "You're really kind of okay," Nola said, as if she had heard strong arguments to the contrary. "You remind me of some movie actor."

"I do?" I was thrilled because just that morning, while studying myself in the bathroom mirror, I'd thought that I had something of Rory Calhoun's looks—a blade thin but muscular body; sharp, crafty face with a handsome, hawk-like nose tilting out of it.

"Who?" I asked. "What actor?"

"Jack Webb," she said.

I tried to hide my disappointment. I laughed. "Dum-da-da-*dum*," I sang, thinking that the stupid "Dragnet" theme would haunt me for the rest of my life.

"You remind *me* of a movie star, too," I said.

This seemed to startle her. "Really?" she said eagerly. Who? Tell me."

I almost said, because I was still smarting from the Jack Webb comparison, *Lassie*! but then my devotion to her overcame my anger and I quickly blurted out, "Debra Paget." And it was true, she did look like Debra Paget, the beautiful actress who played Indian princesses almost exclusively, except that Debra Paget had a magnificent body with powerful, coppery breasts that looked like

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they could punch holes into sheet metal. Nola had no breasts at all.

"Oh, you're *crazy*," she said, obviously pleased.

We returned to the prewar Buick after a while and did it again. When we finished, Nola said, "See? That was a thousand percent better than the first time, Miles, wasn't it?" She patted the back of my head. I'd seen her pat Pershing, whom she regarded as an emotional cripple, in this same encouraging way.

"Affirmative," I said.

I began to think that I could not bear to go to Biloxi, Mississippi and leave Nola Dakeman behind. Life without Nola seemed like no life at all; it seemed like death. Nothing that would happen from now on could excite or motivate me if Nola were not at my side sharing every detail of the experience. I'd be no better than a zombie, sleepwalking through the world. Mom knew something was wrong, and she probably knew what it was, but she couldn't bring herself to discuss it. At best she would whisper abstract complaints, to no particular sympathizer, about the endless housecleaning, laundering and cooking she had to do for little or no thanks.

In my lovesickness, I had become a slob. My hair was growing back unevenly in scruffy patches but I wouldn't go to a barber shop. I didn't shave for days at a time. In the mirror, to my disgust—despite my general lack of grooming and military neatness—I began to look more and more like Jack Webb. I twisted what forelocks I had into curls, greasing them and making them hang on my forehead, hoping for a dashing, Rory Calhoun effect, but I only looked like a Picasso caricature of Sargeant Joe Friday. I even started smoking because I had never seen Jack Webb with a cigarette in his mouth.

"I won't have you leaving filthy cigarettes around my house," Mom said, a new coldness in her voice.

"Roger, wilco," I said, stubbing out my Chesterfield in the kitchen sink.

"My car is full of beach sand," she said.

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"Sorry about that," I said.

"Don't sorry-about-that *me,* young man. I want you to clean it out or not use it again. Do you understand me?"

I rolled my eyes toward the ceiling in the now universal James Dean manner. "Affirmative," I said.

And later, adopting a more conciliatory tone, she said, "Miles, I know you're seeing that . . . that *skinny* girl. I really don't understand it, not that it's any of my business, but why can't you look up your old high school friends? Why are you avoiding them?"

My old high school friends had their own lives. They had jobs now, or were in the military. We were all light-years removed from the kind of shoulder-punching, smart-mouth, street-loitering way of life we never once saw as limited, shallow or futureless. I thought of them now, at Mom's insistence, and could not clearly remember their faces.

We were sitting at the kitchen table. Mom slid a wedge of peach pie in front of me. She pressed a scoop of vanilla ice cream into it, and then another. The fatty pink flesh hanging from her arms jiggled with the effort.

"No thanks," I said, pushing it away.

It's hard for pale blue eyes to look tragic but when they do it takes your breath away. Tears in unreal abundance flooded down her face. She turned and stumbled out of the kitchen making warbling, wet moans. I was too shocked, for a moment, to move.

Inexplicably, my reaction to Mom's outburst was *rage.* I dumped the pie and ice cream into the sink and stormed out of the house, slamming the door so hard that something inside fell off a wall. I crossed the street to the Dakeman house and knocked on the door. I'd never gone up to the Dakeman front door once in all the years we'd lived across from each other. After at least two minutes, Mr. Dakeman himself answered. He squinted at me through an alcoholic mist. "She's out," he said. Then he grinned a little. "Come on in and wait, Captain."

We went into the living room, where Mr. Dakeman had been watching the wrestling matches on TV and

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drinking Seagram's Seven. An angry crackle of frying meat came from the kitchen. I could almost feel beads of drifting fat settle on my face. On the TV screen, Lord Blears was stomping the throat of Antonino Rocca, the great, acrobatic wrestler from Argentina.

"You want a drink, Captain?" Mr. Dakeman said.

I started to say no, but hesitated a beat too long and Mr. Dakeman filled a spare shot glass to the brim. "Down the hatch," he said, filling his own glass and lifting it to his lips with the grace and efficiency of a journeyman drinker. I raised my glass more cautiously and then leaned forward so that my puckered lips would catch the rim before any whiskey sloshed over it. Mr. Dakeman was a round-bellied, narrow-shouldered man with big, dark-knuckled hands. He smelled of sour, days-old sweat, booze and fried meat. He had little, intelligent eyes that glinted with a mean spirited self-satisfaction. Though he seemed to be absorbed in the wrestling match, I knew he was watching me out of the corner of his eye as I sipped from my shot glass. I swallowed all the whiskey then and set the empty glass down. My face got hot. He refilled my glass. I lit a cigarette. Antonino Rocca had recovered from getting his throat stomped and now had Lord Blears trapped in a grapevine twist. Lord Blears, monocle in place and bellowing in pain, tried to hop to the ropes. "Phony limey bastard," Mr. Dakeman said.

"Break his back, Rocca," I said, feeling the whiskey.

"Rocca could do it," Mr. Dakeman said, soberly.

We spoke of wrestling and drank as the whiskey-loosened minutes got away from us and the room darkened. At one point, Mrs. Dakeman came in with steaks fried to the density of leather and covered with scorched onions. She set the plates down on the coffee table, one for Mr. Dakeman, one for me. Mr. Dakeman accepted his dinner without acknowledgement. I started to say something, but thought better of disturbing Mrs. Dakeman's perfect distraction.

"Salt," Mr. Dakeman said, his eyes fixed on the TV set,

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and his wife returned with a shaker of salt, again without apparent expectation of a mutter or nod of thanks from her husband. Rocca had beaten Lord Blears, two falls out of three, and now Gorgeous George was taking on Wild Red Berry in the main event.

"Red Berry's tough," Mr. Dakeman said, a wad of steak in his cheek, "but he's too small. That hairy fruitcake's got forty, fifty pounds on him."

The front door opened and Eldon Dakeman came in. He stood in the half-light of the living room, steel lunch pail dangling at the end of his long arm. He was as big as ever but there was a curvature to his back I didn't remember. He had developed an older man's stoop. Nola had told me that Eldon was now working for Ducommon Steel down in National City, making good money unloading finished steel products from railroad cars.

"Hey, Eldon," I said.

He peered into the dim room, gradually recognizing his father and me sitting on the couch. "Hey, Mike," he said.

"Miles," I said, but Eldon ignored the correction. He had finished socializing. He went into the kitchen and came out gripping a steak in his hand. Then he went off to his room, his footfalls shaking the house. I tried to imagine what Eldon looked like in a sailor uniform. The effort made me smile. He must have seemed dangerously improbable to his superior officers. They must have come to believe that the entire hierarchy of Naval command would have been compromised if Eldon was allowed to wear, and distort, the uniform.

"Miles," Mr. Dakeman said, in a musing tone of voice. "Who the Jesus gave you a handle like that, Captain?"

Gorgeous George took something out of his trunks while the referee wasn't looking. He had Wild Red Berry's arms twisted into the ropes. He rubbed the stuff from his trunks into Wild Red's eyes.

"That's cayenne pepper!" Mr. Dakeman said. "That pansy can't win without pulling a stunt like that."

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"I don't know who gave it to me," I said.

"What?" Mr. Dakeman said, leaning toward the TV set. Wild Red Berry had just drop-kicked Gorgeous George into a corner post and was now working him over with flying mares. I refilled my shot glass.

"It was probably my mother," I said. "She likes dignified names like Miles and Terrence. Jonathan, Carlton, Emory. Do you know what my Dad's name is? It's Leland." I was sitting on the floor by then, my legs stretched out under the coffee table. I forgot myself and spit angrily into the dog-stained carpet, thinking of my name and how I hated it. The lumpish body of a big, sleeping mongrel pressed against my thigh. A smelly child in diapers stood next to me and touched my ear with a popsicle. I saw Mrs. Dakeman come and go a number of times, carrying dishes or whispering the names of children. I saw that my glass was full again and so I emptied it as Wild Red Berry defeated Gorgeous George with a punishing Boston Crab, a submission hold, the inescapable hold all wrestlers feared.

A sound from the street pierced through the cheering crowd and Mr. Dakeman's rumbling snores. It sent a spasm through my drunken heart. It was the sound of Nola's wild rebellious laughter. I started to get up, then decided to stay put. I thought I should be seen sitting on the floor with a shot glass in my hand watching TV with her father, as if I were one of the family. But she didn't come in. When she laughed again, I got up and went to the door and opened it a crack.

She was leaning against a '52 Ford Victoria. It was a beautiful car—lowered, leaded, chopped, channeled, with a custom paint job, a metallic maroon so deep and liquid it looked like you could slip your arm into it straight to the elbow. The driver of the car had his head tilted out the window. A cigarette hung from his lower lip. He was a Drifter. The club's name, carved into a cast-aluminum plaque, dangled from the rear bumper

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of the Ford on chromium chains. He had long sideburns and his hair was sculpted into a well-greased duck's ass. He gunned the engine now and then, filling the semi-dark neighborhood with a window-vibrating roar. When he let it idle, I could hear the radical camshaft make the engine stutter. It was a street dragster, meant for high RPMs. It idled nervously, the timing unsure of itself. Nola, her hands shoved into the front pockets of her cutoff Levis, leaned down to the indifferent Drifter and waited for him to remove his cigarette. He took his time, but when he finally flipped the butt into the street, she kissed him. Her head and shoulders gradually entered the narrow window. Then the upper half of her body was inside the car, lost in a well of shadow. It looked as if she were sinking into a maroon lake. Her long foot rose, slowly, and the sandal it was wearing slipped off. The toes of the foot curled tightly. Then they splayed.

I switched the porch light on and off several times, as any father might have done. Of course, Mr. Dakeman would not have stood at the door observing his daughter protectively. The dignity and responsibility of fatherhood were not high on his list of personal standards. I glanced over at him. He was awake again, staring wearily at Dick Lane, the ringside announcer, who was giving his redundant analysis of the matches we had seen and what we could expect in the future. I snapped the porch light on and off with the outrage of someone who had rights—a father, an older brother. A lover. And, of course, I immediately felt like an idiot, like a coward. The truth was, the Drifters were a legendary car club, known for their fearless run-ins with the cops, their lead-pipe and chain-swinging brawls with other car clubs, and for their amazing *cars,* each of which was a legitimate work of art. I was in awe of the Drifters and their cars, and couldn't have gone out in the street to claim Nola: without a car of equal beauty and sophistication, I could not have competed.

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I sat down on the couch and poured myself another shot of whiskey. I let my glass rest on my teeth and I felt, along with the burning trickle of booze, the throbs from the radical Ford as it eased away from the house.

My heart speeded up, anticipating Nola, but as minutes passed I realized that she had gone off with the Drifter again. My irate-father-at-the-light-switch act probably meant something altogether different to her than it would have meant to a girl from a decent family. She probably thought it was her mother, or a sister or brother, warning her away from the house because her father was on a bloodletting rampage.

I left Mr. Dakeman sunk into the corner of his sofa, his sagging face pale in the TV's gray flickering light. When I crossed our lawn, Pershing grazed my knee with his big sad head. I knelt beside him and hugged him until he trembled with anxiety. He wasn't accustomed to physical demonstrations of emotional need. Then I took his rope and unhooked it from his collar. "You're free, Pershing," I said. "Go piss on a tire." But Pershing just stood next to the mulberry tree and quivered.

I was very sick the next day. Physically more than emotionally, but as my strength came back, this order was reversed. I packed, half-heartedly, the things I needed to take to Keesler Air Force Base. Civilian clothes were not permitted in basic, but in technical school we would be allowed to spend weekend passes out of uniform. Not that I looked forward to weekends. I didn't look forward to anything. I had made the mistake of waiting for the Drifter to bring her back. I'd waited out on the porch, talking to Pershing who stayed under his protecting tree, tethered to his own timidity. I waited an hour. Then the customized Ford turned the corner and rumbled down the street. The Drifter eased up to the curb in front of the Dakeman house and turned off his lights. Then he turned off his engine. I watched the dark unmoving car. A silence, like the hush of conspirators, sealed our neighborhood from the rest of the universe.

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But Pershing's keen ears twitched and he glanced quickly at the Ford, then guiltily back at me.

I imagine he heard the secret friction of flesh, the fluid roar of hearts. He looked at me in alarm, his sorrowful eyes understanding, but not quite condoning, my apparent complaisance. "I don't own her, you idiot," I said.

I tried to eat breakfast and failed. After picking at a four-egg cheese omelet for a few minutes, I had to run to the bathroom. Mom seemed sympathetic, but her sympathy came from a distance. She'd lost faith in me. I was not going to be a robust eater with a positive outlook like Dad or my lumberjack uncles. I skipped lunch, went for a long walk instead. When I got home, I saw Nola sitting on her front porch. She was wearing her cutoffs, her round white thighs held wide in brave unconscious welcome.

"Hey, Miles," she said.

I didn't trust my voice, so I just waved. I was wearing my uniform. The crisp, silvery-blue sheen of it had a good effect on me. It took away some of my bitterness. The uniform reminded me that I belonged to something much larger and far more dependable than this narrow street with its tense little lawns and hedges and the Dakeman's dust bowl eyesore. I was an airman third-class, soon to be a trained specialist, destined to fly in the RC-121-C Super Connies, the radar picket planes that defended the coastlines of our nation from sneak attack. I felt sorry for Eldon who had lost his chance with the navy. But it was the kind of pity that gives you a warm feeling of comfortable self-regard.

"You look sharp, Miles," she said.

I stopped. I pulled my cigarettes out and lit up. "Thanks, Nola," I said. Then, touching the bill of my cap, I added, "For *every*thing." It was a scene from a movie, an airman's good-bye to the things that would grow small and quaint as he rose higher and higher into the blue yonder. It was the right thing to say. It was exactly what Rory Calhoun would have said.

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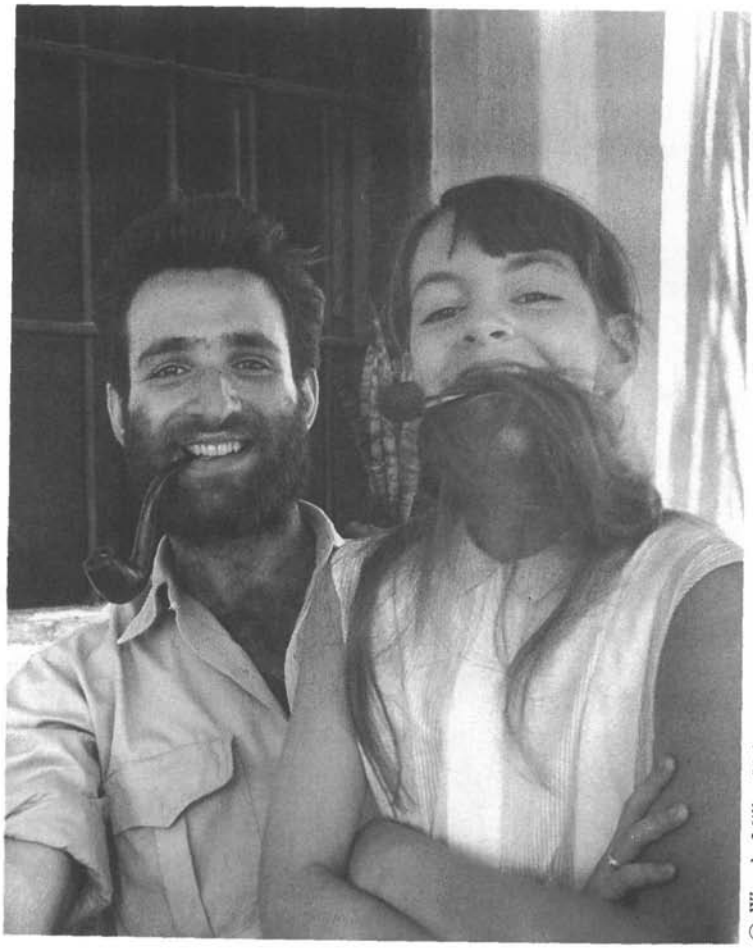

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Ben Sonnenberg with the photographer's daughter in Málaga, 1961.

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La Consula

Ben Sonnenberg

La Consula was a big white house with Doric columns along the front. It sat in a park on the road between Churriana and Alhaurín de la Torre, near the Málaga airport. People spoke of La Consula as if it were the Villa America and we were all on the Riviera with Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, and Bill and Annie Davis were Gerald and Sarah Murphy.

Not only had Ernest Hemingway stayed at La Consula. So had Cyril Connolly, whom Bill Davis called "my brother-in-law," though Annie Davis's sister, Jean, was long dead; so had Sinbad Vail, Peggy Guggenheim's son; and Caresse Crosby, who with her husband had run the Black Sun Press and published James Joyce. In the summer of '62, I started to go there a lot.

Bill Davis looked American. He wore blue deck shoes and white duck trousers and that kind of short-sleeved shirt which everyone wears nowadays but which then used to remind me of the polo player Tommy Hitchcock. Bill's trousers all had button flies. He was bald and tall and built like an athlete, with that sort of deformation

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athletes sometimes have. A slightly elongated right arm: from too much polo perhaps? A deafness in the right ear: from too much shooting? And Bill Davis sounded American. "I'm going to give you the gen on Granada." Most American expatriates tried to sound British. We spoke of "school hols" and "a spot of chat." But Bill knew about swimming and tennis; he knew about bullfighting; and he spoke about books as he did about sports. "Let me run down the form on Bill Faulkner for you."

Another American thing about Bill: his mother's family had been the model for the Ambersons in Booth Tarkington's novel. He remembered the old Waldorf-Astoria, when it was where the Empire State Building is today. "When my mother ran away from my father to be with her lover, who happened to be the scapegrace heir to the Pinkerton detective fortune, we all lived at the old hotel," he said, "the happiest years of my youth." Ah! the bliss of an absent father, luxury, adultery, room service and a happy mother. An Amberson Abroad.

Bill had big lips (which I fear was why Ernest Hemingway called him "Negro") and a pleasant hoarse voice so low as to be inaudible sometimes. He had trouble talking, starting to drool, especially when excited, so being laconic suited him well and made him sound more American. He kept much of his past a secret, with lightning flashes of detail. After Yale, a spell on the *Herald Tribune*: stories of drinking at "Blake's." Then a Mexican period when he first met Hemingway. Then a time in New York in the early forties when he was Peggy Guggenheim's lover and helped her with her gallery, Art of this Century, and knew Ernst and Pollock and Gorky. Bill's first wife was a Peabody (pronounced *Pea*-biddy). His war was making training films about VD or something like that. I know he wasn't an officer. He said that not to have been one, "you had either to be an idiot or an awful snob."

The money to run La Consula was said to be Annie's.

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She was a Bakewell from Baltimore. Which meant that her "people" had money? She was certainly rude enough, often enough. But she would have given Bill everything, however much or little she had. That was the truly important thing. They both had that air of recklessness which people who marry in middle-age sometimes make up for themselves. With Annie and Bill Davis, I'm sure it was genuine. It took the form of living not on income but principal, and what could be more reckless than that?

Bill had an obsessive interest in the very rich and their "arrangements." Of the famous society murder that had taken place a few years before, he said, "To understand the Woodward murder, you have to know that after she blew off her husband's head and told the butler, the first person the butler phoned was Missus Woodward Senior, and the first person *Missus Woodward* phoned was her old beau, Averill Harriman, who happened to be Governor, and *he* phoned Cissy Patterson who owned *The Daily News,* and only then was the butler told to phone the State Police. . . This gen is from Bill Woodward's sister Ethel. I like it because it shows beyond doubt that the very rich *can* get away with murder."

Bill told me what Ernest Hemingway had told him about his famous exchange with Scott Fitzgerald. "Ernest didn't say, *Yes, they have more money*. What he said was, *Yes, they don't give a fuck,* and a hoor who was sitting at the bar with them said, *Neither do I!*"

Hemingway had stayed at La Consula during the Dangerous Summer (so-called) of 1959. Bill had been his chauffeur, driving from *corrida* to *corrida* so that they could see Antonio Ordóñez *mano a mano* with his brother-in-law, Luís Dominguín. Bill had dressing-room stories about Ordóñez which I'm afraid were wasted on me. I do remember Bill telling me how exceedingly lightly Hemingway moved. "The most graceful man I ever saw."

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"With a beautiful tenor voice," Annie said.

"Graceful," Bill said. "Balanced at the hips."

"Like a dancer," Annie said.

Hemingway's sixtieth birthday party had been at the Hotel Miramár in Málaga the year before, when he'd shown signs of madness that no one could mistake. A year later, in August 1960, he was again at La Consula (that was the summer he quarreled with Ken Tynan), and Bill was "shocked at how ruined Ernest was." Bill told me, "I don't think Ernest ever knew how damaged he'd been by the two plane crashes."[1]

Another time Bill told me that Ernest gave him the wristwatch he wore. "Ernest said, *You don't own a thing really and truly until you give it away.*"

Bill's stories were the real scoop, the true gen. And how amusing of Bill to say that to be very rich was "to have a hard-on and nowhere to put it"!

It was all *very* American.

Bill's English house guests were titled, swept up by him from the bar at White's, where he was a member, or from a country house party somewhere. His American house guests were famous, one for "having revolutionized the modern game of backgammon," another for being "a three-figure man." One was famous for something he'd done at Yale (Bill was Yale '29), one was famous for having been in the U.S. Army Ski Corps in World War II when he'd invented a maneuver that downhill skiers still use.

[1] In his 1987 biography, Kenneth Lynn writes that in the summer of 1960 "Bill Davis was staggered by the psychological changes that had taken place in his friend in less than a year. [Hemingway] couldn't sleep, in spite of the pills he gulped, and everything worried him—including the idea that Bill was plotting to kill him by wrecking the automobile in which he drove him about. Feelings of loneliness, guilt, and remorse swept over him in enormous waves, along with a terrible frustration whenever his memory failed him."

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In the games room at La Consula, against a wall of books about American social history, I used to see men and women I'd only read about, in Henry James and John O'Hara. Their good manners: dispassionate, uniform, especially to servants: were those of professional houseguests. They looked like skeletons. I saw through them to *The Gilded Age, The Robber Barons* and *America's 60 Families* on the shelves at the end of the room. They behaved to one another with such cold-blooded courtesy, it was hard to believe they were ever hot. Skeletons. Yet of one of them, Bill said, "He'd sleep with a snake if he couldn't get a woman." Of another, a woman notorious for her very many rich lovers, Bill told me she'd put their names in a book, together with their "grades." She kept the book at her bedside. "She calls it her *fucking* book," Bill said. " 'Where's my *fucking* book?' "

I once wrote down in my notebook the names of all the people I met that summer at La Consula. I was thinking of writing a story about two small children growing up in a house given over to guests. They would be a brother and sister, aged about nine and seven, like the Davis children. The houseguests would be leeching away the children's futures.

At La Consula, then, in the summer of 1962, I met Sir Robert and Lady (Isabel) Throckmorton; the British painter and sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi; Rupert and Jeannie Bellville (he had flown for Franco; she was American, with money); their son, Hercules Bellville, and his girlfriend, Charmian Montague-Douglas Scott; Rupert Lycett-Green and his girlfriend, Candida Betjeman; the Marquess of Bath and his sons, Christopher and Valentine Thynne; Anthony and Violet Powell and their son, Tristram; "Puffin" Asquith and David Niven, Xan and Daphne Fielding, Georgia Tennant who was staying with Gerald Brenan; Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy who was writing a book on the British nanny; Patrick Kinross who was writing a life of Ataturk; Kenneth Wagg who had been

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in love with the American actress Margaret Sullavan and then married the Horlick heiress; and Sarah Courtauld and her brother Simon and his friend, Bozo Ivanovic.

The Americans I met that summer at La Consula were Ted Basset and Inez ("Inky") Millholland Rupp; the abstract expressionist painter José Guerrero and Roxy Guerrero; A.E. Hotchner and his family; Harvey Breit, John Crosby, and Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery Patterson Ford.

From Churriana, down the road, came Lucia Gold with her younger sister, Dorothy, who liked swimming naked; and from up the road, Ethel Woodward de Croisset and her sons, Charles and Patrick de Croisset; and the American painter Bayard Osborn, his wife, Anita, and his daughters, Margaret and Io.

Also, one day, from Estoril, came the Prince d'Orleáns (who was not French but Spanish). He wore plus-fives and a Norfolk jacket of very heavy tweed, and was holding two big brown and white springer or clumber spaniels. Finally, there was young Timothy Willoughby d'Eresby, the heir of the Duke of Ancaster. Willoughby owned a discothèque in Torremolinos, was good-looking in a Byronic way and was generous with money and was drowned off Cap d'Antibes the next summer while sailing to Corsica.

La Consula had been a convent. Now it was a place where men and women with pedigrees could come and play cards and fall in love. However empty and boring they were, they would still be known and esteemed there for their antecedents. I could bring my friends to La Consula and not apologize. I could come and go there and fall in love and not have to explain. The boring, pretentious and empty talk? A small price to pay for meeting beautiful young girls and boys with names like Iope Oldcastle and Endymion Porter.

Bill had a collection of Henry James. "I'm lacking *Confidence,*" he said, a late James novel which James

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hadn't liked. I found a copy and gave it to Bill. In return he gave me a Henry James letter, not dated but from when he lived at 34 De Vere Gardens:

> My dear Marriott [?],
>
> I have a great wish to visit face to face with the tributary Three, with nothing more disjunctive than a dining table between us. Will you, to this end (which I have been baffled & hindered in arriving at), give me the pleasure of dining with me on Friday March 20 at the Reform Club, Pall Mall, at 8 o'clock? I am asking only Harland & Crackanthorpe, who I think are able to come. I greatly hope you can join us. Believe me yours ever
>
> Henry James

Like all good presents, this one was half-compliment, half-reproach. The reproachful half said that, as I knew more about riding clothes than I did about riding, more about auction prices and collections than about art, so I knew more of "the mere twaddle of graciousness," as James called such letters, than of the passions and disappointments underlying a London "season."

For at one time I had told Bill, "I am *socially* very ambitious." I can't believe now that I said this, and I can't think what I meant. That I wanted to marry Iope Oldcastle? That I wanted crested invitations on my mantle? That I wanted to be a member of White's? Thanks to Bill, I did get invited to Chatsworth by "Debo," the Duchess of Devonshire and to Longleat by Henry, the Marquess of Bath and to two or three other great houses for fashionable weekends. But I never got invited back. As Wilde said of Frank Harris, "Frank is invited everywhere—once."

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I never discovered exactly what my gaffes had been. Chesterton says somewhere that while a murderer may expect absolution, there is no forgiveness in heaven for having chosen the wrong fork. I never did anything quite like that; but what was it I did wrong? Only once did a social error of mine meet with a prompt, explicit and condign rebuke. It was when joking with Princess Margaret at Kensington Palace, I likened something (I forget what) to the American attitude to George the Third. "*King* George the Third," Princess Margaret said.

In that phase of my life: briefly among the Right, the Real, the Royal, and even (sometimes) the Right Real Rich: I remember turning up my nose at the tacky coziness of certain domestic arrangements in the great houses I went to: the electric heater, the cheap storebought lamp, the general air in private quarters of a third-class hotel in a second-class place; while outside, in the spacious public rooms, there were decorations by Gibbons and Adams, paintings by Holbein, Bellotto, Marshall and Stubbs, and family portraits by Van Dyck.

And, oh! the boredom of being in the English countryside. The embarrassment of sitting at luncheon with this MP and that ex-minister and having nothing to say. And, oh! the pain of feeling I would never belong to the so despised group. False ennui plus true disappointment. Result: spiteful disapproval.

That same summer at La Consula I met an American man of about Bill's age who Bill said had worked for the CIA, as Bill knew I had. He was retired and was building a house with a swimming pool across from La Consula. We talked obliquely when we first met. Bill said, "Ben lived in Munich for a time." The man knew the Institut für Zeitgeschichte and its director, but he didn't know any of the other people I knew. He wore a small military-type mustache. He was fit, if a little overweight. He smoked cigarettes and drank quite a lot.

The next time we met, at his invitation, for drinks at

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his new house, we sat by the pool and he spoke to me more "confidentially." He told me of Beirut, where he'd just been posted, of Kim Philby, who'd just escaped to the Soviet Union. He told me of seeing the photograph of Mount Ararat that the famous spy used to hang in his office. "No one noticed that it'd been taken from the Russian side."[2] Then he asked me in some detail about the Ukranian Section of Radio Liberation, in and around which I had been. Many of the Ukranians there were openly pro-Nazi, I said; many were ex-Vlassovites and had fought for Hitler. Their anti-Semitism was alarming. I told him of an incident at Radio Liberation when poison was put in the salt cellars in the cafeteria. The culprit was a Ukranian who had wanted revenge on a Jew from his village. That seemed to me typical of what was wrong with the Munich radios. My host said, "It's often true that the policies of very large organizations are determined by the vindictive heat of very low-level agents."

I asked if he knew Merle Dankbloom, who first got me to work for the CIA. No, he said, but the name reminded him of "Vivian Darkbloom," the anagrammatic nom de plume used by Vladimir Nabokov in Berlin in the 1920s. I also asked if he knew Ira Rich, Merle Dankbloom's boss in London, and he said no. Then he asked me about the Szabos, the zookeeper and his wife, whom I'd let through to the States and who'd turned out to be Soviet agents. "Did Szabo tell you what they did about the animals in the zoo?" No, I said; I hadn't thought to ask. He told me that the animals had all been released before the Russian tanks came. "Better dead than Red, I suppose," he said. He told me that it was a variation on what happened at the Royal Zoo at Vincennes in 1789 when in the name of the Revolution the Sans-Culottes demanded that the animals be freed. "For decades the poor animals roamed the forest at Vincennes."

[2] An old chestnut now but a green one then, a story well told by many others, including Graham Greene and the journalist Murray Sayle.

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He asked me why I'd been fired. I said, I guess because of my politics. "They wouldn't have let you go for that," he said. "They like having wide-ranging people like you, rootless, intelligent and detached. So long as they collect gossip." I loved thinking of myself like that. But why didn't they just rely on the small talk of journalists? He said, "I've often wondered that myself."

His name eludes me. I came to know his house well. Next summer I swam in that pool every day. A few years ago I saw him on TV in New York, still fit, still with a smokers' cough, commenting on some recent convulsion in the CIA.

*

Donald Maitland (not his real name) rented that house the next summer. He left Gemma there with their children and a nanny, and went back to London, meaning to return in August for the *féria*. I took Gemma to dinner one night. We went to the restaurant I'd gone to with my father, on the Gibralfaro high above Málaga. Empty then, tonight it was crowded, there was music and you could have any of the dishes the place was famous for: the braised barbel brains from Valéncia, the roast baby boar from Asturias, the nectarines from Spanish Morocco; and the unfamiliar-tasting wines from all the familiar vineyards of Spain.

"Cheer up," I said to Gemma over coffee, lighting up a *maduro* cigar. "Donald will be back soon." Meant to *not* cheer her up, of course. But she burst into tears and people started looking at us. "I always knew you were unhappy," I said, hoping she'd calm down, "because you were always so cheerful." I knew? How perceptive I was! how deep! And she'd been sure I'd never noticed her. "Not notice you? Not notice that ravishing frock with the. . . What do you call 'em?" Buttons? "Buttons, exactly." How keen my eye was! "I was unhappy myself, you know. Yes, an unhappy romance with Charmian

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Scott." The beautiful niece of the Duke of Buccleugh? "I was in love with Charmian and Charmian wasn't in love with me." How was that possible? Her tiny hand on my big one, she told how she hated Charmian Scott for having made me suffer.

The night was warm, I put the top down, and we drove back to her house very fast. She threw back her head in the car and laughed and said she felt free, *free!* "Like Nicole Diver in *Tender Is the Night,*" I said. (How well read I was!)

"And to think that tonight is my tenth wedding anniversary," she said when we got to her house. "I was never *disloyal* to Donald before."

By this time I owed her husband between four and five thousand pounds.

I began staying at La Consula and slipping out after the house was asleep to go each night to Gemma Maitland. She showed me exciting English country house-party skills: how to make your bed look slept in when you spent the night somewhere else. "Crease the sheets like this, press them down like that." I used to leave her house before dawn. No one saw me. No one. But if they had, they'd have admired my luck, my grace, my stealth, my shoes, my shirt.

One day we made an excursion to Mijas, another town like Ronda being punished for its fidelity to the Republican government. "But why are they so unforgiving?" she said. Patiently I explained. On other days she came to Granja Amos or we went for two or three hours to a house that I knew was empty: no one there but the servants. I boasted to her of past love affairs.

"You can have any woman you want, I suppose?"

"Alas, yes," I said (I'd been waiting to say this for years, ever since I first read it in a story by Barbey d'Aurevilly) "because of my looks, I have never had the profits of my timidity."[3]

[3] "*Le plus bel amour de Don Juan*" in *Les Diaboliques: "Grace à un beau visage, je n'ai jamais eu les profites de ma timidité."*

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We frequently went on picnics with Bill and Annie Davis.

"Gemma's in love with you, isn't she?" That was Annie one afternoon. Gemma and I had disappeared and come back to the picnic smiling.

"Yes, and she's leaving her husband," I said, trying to sound like Count Vronsky in *Anna Karenina*. "We're all going to live somewhere in the south."

"You're already in the south," Annie said. "And what about the children?"

"I'll educate the children myself." Gemma and Donald had two little children, a son of three and a daughter of five. I liked them all right.

"What will Donald say?" That was Bill. We were in his dressing room. I was looking at his trousers and belts and admiring how the buttons were fastened on his shirts. I said I knew exactly what Donald Maitland would say, having a scene from *Anna Karenina* in mind. Donald would sound like Alexéy Karenin, cracking his knuckles as he spoke. Bill said, "You'll have to find money somewheres, I guess . . . ." True, but all I was thinking was, *Gemma puts powder on her thighs with a powder puff and I've never known a woman who does that after her bath.* "Now don't get me wrong, Ben, I'm not saying I'd ever kick Gemma out of bed, but hairdressers, dressmakers . . . As the song says, *Romance without finance is a nuisance.*"

"Do you think we're doing the right thing?" Gemma said. We were in the woods. There was a mill and a millstream. She was crying and she was twisting a little white handkerchief to shreds. Their car and driver had come down from London the day before. It was one of those boxy limousines with a sphinx on the hood, not as good as a Daimler, but better than an Austin Princess. Donald was coming back the next day.

"Why don't we say nothing?" I was thinking we could see one another in London, me living in rooms in Half Moon Street, a few blocks away from Gemma, near where John Reginald Christie used to pick up prostitutes

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before taking them to his house at 10 Rillington Place and murdering them. I would be a famous philanderer. *His mistress is the beautiful Gemma Maitland,* they'd whisper at Wilton's, as I was leaving the restaurant. Meanwhile Gemma stopped crying. She gave me her handkerchief, wet with her tears.

"Yes, yes, let's say nothing!" she said.

But she was eager to tell Donald, and tell Donald she did.

The scene with the three of us soon took place. It didn't go as I'd planned. Did I want my legs broken? Did I want my hands nailed to the floor? That would happen if I saw Gemma again. "A vacation love affair . . . all very well if you're twenty-five, and single," Donald said harshly, adding (suddenly lyrical), "And it's summertime in the south of Spain . . . ."

I was afraid he was going to cry, but he said, "Unlike you, I believe in the family." Hypocrite! I looked at Gemma, she looked at the floor.

"I see it's cold chicken in *Gatsby,*" I said. I was thinking of the scene where Tom and Daisy Buchanan are reconciled. It wasn't the zinger I needed, but still . . .

"Where can I write you?" I managed to whisper to Gemma before I left.

"You can't write me—*ever!*" she whispered back. "It's over!"

"Couldn't you take a post office box? Or let me write care of Elspeth." Elspeth was her best friend.

"Post office boxes are squalid, *I* always think."

"Well, maybe Donald's right and we shouldn't—"

"*Write care of Elspeth!*" were her last words.

Maitland showed me the door, sounding at last like Alexéy Karenin. "My secretary will be sending you a memorandum of your account."[4]

[4] There is no such scene in *Anna Karenina* as I imagined among Alexéy and Anna and Vronsky after the love affair begins.

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I don't know what's become of La Consula. Bill and Annie sold it in the seventies. They lived partly with their neighbor, Ethel de Croisset, in Alhaurín, and partly in rented houses in London. My friendship with them became troubled (for reasons I needn't go into) and ended. I corresponded with Bill, over my publication in *Grand Street* of pieces of Cyril Connolly's journals; our friendship revived a little; and then his subscription lapsed.

I wrote to Ethel de Croisset. She told me that Bill died in May 1985 and that Annie died some hours after. "He had liver cancer which he treated with all sorts of health food diets . . . She had angina and was told to lose weight. Her worry in life was that she would outlive Bill, so she simply got fatter and fatter while he got thinner."

I wrote this to Gemma, thinking (why? I wonder now) she might even be moved; I certainly was. Gemma answered, thank you, so nice to hear from you, sorry about Bill and Annie but "rather a mean ending to their lives, don't you think?"

I haven't been to the Costa del Sol in years. I imagine it's all like Marbella now: full of Euro- and Amerotrash; friends of Taki and Jimmy Goldsmith; and fugitives from the law, with their yachts and girlfriends and rows of coke. In the days I write of, however, there was no one "interesting" there; except that, for me, Bill and Annie were, as he'd say, "worth knowing."

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Rick DeMarinis is the author of six novels, including *The Year of the Zinc Penny* and *The Burning Women of Far Cry.* "An Airman's Good-bye" is included in his story collection, *The Voice of America,* forthcoming from W.W. Norton.

Murray Pomerance's stories have appeared in *Chelsea, The Boston Review, Confrontation, The Kenyon Review* and *The Paris Review.* "A Shore Pavane" and "Lunch with Roger" will appear in the fall, in a hand-printed folio from *les trois O Editions,* an imprint of Gabbro Press.

Nicholas Shakespeare's first novel, *The Vision of Elena Silves,* was recently published by Knopf. He is the literary editor of the London *Daily Telegraph* and has published two books of nonfiction.

Lily Tuck's novel *Interviewing Matisse, or the Woman Who Died Standing Up* was published this year by Knopf. She also works as a translator.

POETRY

Jonathan Aaron's first book of poems, *Second Sight,* was chosen by Anthony Hecht as a winner of the 1982 National Poetry Series Open Competition and was published by Harper and Row. *Corridor,* his new book of poetry, from which the poems in this issue are excerpted, will be published early next year by the Wesleyan University Press in conjunction with the University Press of New England. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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Tina Barr's work is forthcoming in *Chelsea, Crazyhorse, Boulevard, Yellow Silk* and elsewhere. She is completing her dissertation in English literature at Temple University.

Yves Bonnefoy's work spans nearly four decades, from his earliest volume, *Du mouvement et de l'immobilite de Douve,* published in 1953, to *Ce qui fut sans lumiere,* which appeared in 1987. The author of numerous books and essays on poetics and art history, as well as translations into French of Shakespeare and Yeats, Bonnefoy has held the Chair of Comparative Studies in Poetics at the College de France since 1982. **Lisa Sapinkopf**'s translations of his poems won the Columbia University Translation Center Prize. She has collaborated extensively with the poet. Her translations have appeared in *Partisan Review, Ploughshares, New Orleans Review, Translation* and numerous other journals.

David Bottoms's poems have appeared in many magazines, including *The Atlantic Monthly, The New Yorker* and *Harper's,* as well as in numerous anthologies. His first book, *Shooting Rats at the Bibb Country Dump,* won the 1979 Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets. He is the author of a novel, *Any Cold Jordan,* two other poetry collections, and is co-editor of *The Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets.* His most recent book is *Easter Weekend* (Houghton Mifflin).

Steven Cramer's first book, *The Eye That Desires to Look Upward,* was published by Galileo Press in 1987. He has completed a second collection entitled *The World Book,* poems from which have appeared or are forthcoming in *Boulevard, The New Republic* and other journals. His poems and book reviews have recently appeared in *The Antioch Review, The Atlantic Monthly* and *Poetry.* He is an instructor of writing at Tufts University.

T. Crunk was born in Kentucky and now lives in Greenwood, Virginia. His collection *Living in the Resurrection* was awarded the 1989 Virginia Prize in Poetry.

Stephen Dunn's eighth collection of poetry, *Landscape at the End of the Century,* was published in 1991 by W.W. Norton. He teaches at Stockton State College in New Jersey.

Tess Gallagher's most recent work includes *Amplitude: New and Selected Poems, Concert of Tenses,* a collection of essays, and the introduction to a book of photographs entitled *Carver Country.*

Dana Gioia is a businessman in New York. His most recent books are *Mottetti,* a translation of the love poetry of the Italian Nobel laureate Eugenio Montale and *New Italian Poets,* an anthology, co-edited with Michael Palma. His second collection of poems, *The Gods of Winter,* is forthcoming from Graywolf Press.

Walter Griffin's poems have appeared in *Harper's, Poetry, Evergreen Review, The Sewanee Review, New England Review/Bread Loaf Quarterly, Prairie Schooner, The Southern Review* and elsewhere. His most recent book, *West-*

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ern Flyers, was cowinner of the University of West Florida's Panhandler Series. He is the former director of the poetry-in-the-schools programs in Georgia and Tennessee.

Marilyn Hacker is the author of seven books of poetry, most recently *Going Back to the River* (Random House) and *The Hang-Glider's Daughter: New and Selected Poems,* to be published in London by Onlywomen Press. She is editor of the *Kenyon Review.*

Daniel Halpern is the author of six collections of poetry, including *Tango, Seasonal Rights* and *Life Among Others.* Knopf will publish a new collection, *Foreign Neon,* late this year. He edits *Antaeus* and The Ecco Press and teaches in the graduate writing program of Columbia University.

Daryl Hine's most recent book of poetry, *Postscripts,* was published in January by Knopf. His collection *Ovid's Heroines,* from which the poems appearing in this issue were excerpted, will appear in the fall from Yale University Press. He is a MacArthur Fellow.

James Laughlin's most recent book is *Random Stories* (Moyer Bell).

David Lehman's most recent books are *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man* (Poseidon Press) and a poetry collection, *Operation Memory* (Princeton University Press). In 1990 he received the award in literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

Campbell McGrath tells us he has worked as a pig farmer, a snake handler, a paid political consultant, a gandy dancer, a cocktail waiter and an astronaut. He is the author of *Capitalism.* His poetry has appeared in *The New Yorker, Antaeus, TriQuarterly, Big Wednesday, Caliban, Ohio Review* and other journals. He lives in Chicago.

Milan Richter is a freelance writer and translator living in Dunajska Luzna, a village near Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. He is the author of four volumes of poetry: *Evening Mirrors* (1973), *Whips* (1975), *Pollen* (1976) and *The Secure Place* (1987). His translator, **Jascha Kessler**, is the author of three books of poetry and six volumes of short stories and has translated seven volumes of poetry and fiction from Hungarian, Persian and Bulgarian. He is a professor of English and modern literature at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Mark Rudman's most recent books include *The Nowhere Steps* (Sheep Meadow Press) and a translation of Bohdan Boychuk's selected poems, *Memories of Love* (Sheep Meadow). A book of essays, *Diverse Voices* (Story Line Press), is forthcoming in the spring of 1992. His essay "Mosaic on Walking" is included in *Best American Essays 1991.*

Ira Sadoff's most recent collection of poems, *Emotional Traffic,* was published by Godine in 1990. His poetry has appeared in *The Southern Review, Kenyon Review, Antaeus* and *The Sewanee Review.* He is the director of the writing program at Colby College.

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Marcia Slatkin, formerly a farmer, is an English teacher, photographer and writer. Her recent work has appeared in *The James Joyce Quarterly, Earth's Daughters, The Reconstructionist, Sunrust* and *The Sycamore Review.* Her manuscript, *A Season's Milking,* was a finalist in the 1990 Barnard Women Poets' Contest. She lives in Suffolk County, New York.

Charlie Smith's books of poetry include *Indistinguishable from the Darkness* (W. W. Norton) and *Red Roads* (National Poetry Series). The poem that appears in this issue will be included in *The Palms,* forthcoming from W. W. Norton in 1992. He is the author of two novels, *Shine Hawk* (Paris Review Editions) and *The Lives of the Dead* (Linden/Simon and Schuster) and a forthcoming novella collection, *Crystal River*, the title novella of which won the *Paris Review*'s Aga Khan Prize for Fiction in 1984. He lives in New York.

Brian Swann is the author of many books of poetry, fiction and poetry in translation and has edited volumes on Native American literature. He teaches at The Cooper Union in New York City and directs the Bennington Writing Workshops.

FEATURES

Shusha Guppy *(Harold Acton interview)* is the London Editor of *The Paris Review* and a regular contributor to *The Daily Telegraph, British Vogue* and other periodicals. She is the author of *The Blindfold Horse,* an autobiographical work and *Looking Back,* a collection of interviews with some of the *grandes dames* of European letters, to be published by Paris Review Editions this summer.

Mary McCarthy (1912-1989) worked as a book reviewer for *The Nation* and *The New Republic* and as a drama reviewer for *Partisan Review.* She is the author of many books, including *The Group, Memories of a Catholic Girlhood, The Company She Keeps,* and numerous nonfiction books. She was awarded the National Medal for Literature in 1984.

Ben Sonnenberg founded *Grand Street* in 1981 and was its editor until the spring of 1990. The piece in this issue is excerpted from his *Lost Property, Memoirs & Confessions of a Bad Boy,* forthcoming later this year from Summit Books.

INTERVIEWS

Elizabeth Gaffney (Günter Grass interview) is an associate editor at *The Paris Review.* She lives in Brooklyn.

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Alfred MacAdam (Octavio Paz interview), critic and translator, lives in New York and teaches at Barnard College and Columbia University. His translations include that of the Uruguayan novelist Juan Carlos Onetti's *Body Snatcher* and, most recently, that of Fernando Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet.*

John Simon (Günter Grass interview) is the drama critic of *New York* magazine and film critic for the *National Review.* His most recent book is *The Sheep from the Goats.*

ART

Peter Halley was born in New York in 1953 and lives in New York. Recent exhibitions of his paintings have been held at Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Santa Monica; Jablonka Galerie, Cologne; and Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

Larry Johnson was born in Long Beach, California in 1959 and lives in Los Angeles. Recent exhibitions of his photographic works have been at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Stuart Regen Gallery, Los Angeles; and 303 Gallery, New York.

Carrie Mae Weems was born in Portland, Oregon in 1953 and currently lives in Seattle. Her photographs have been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York.

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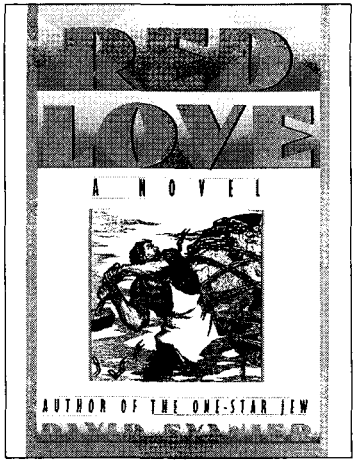

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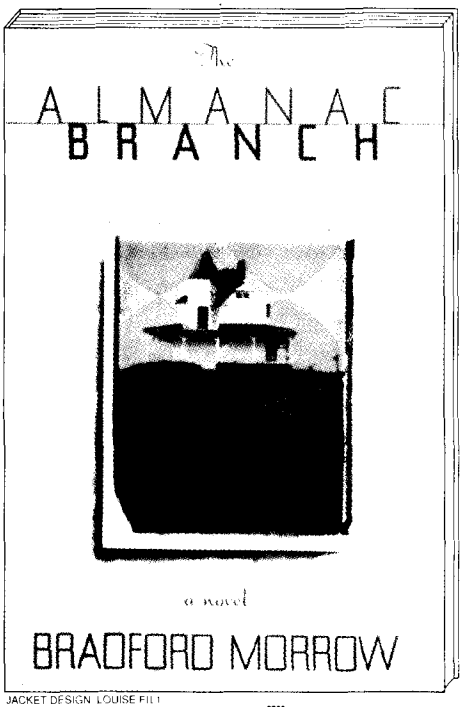

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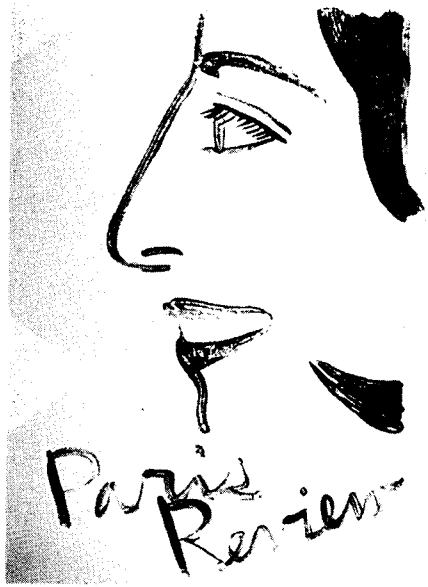

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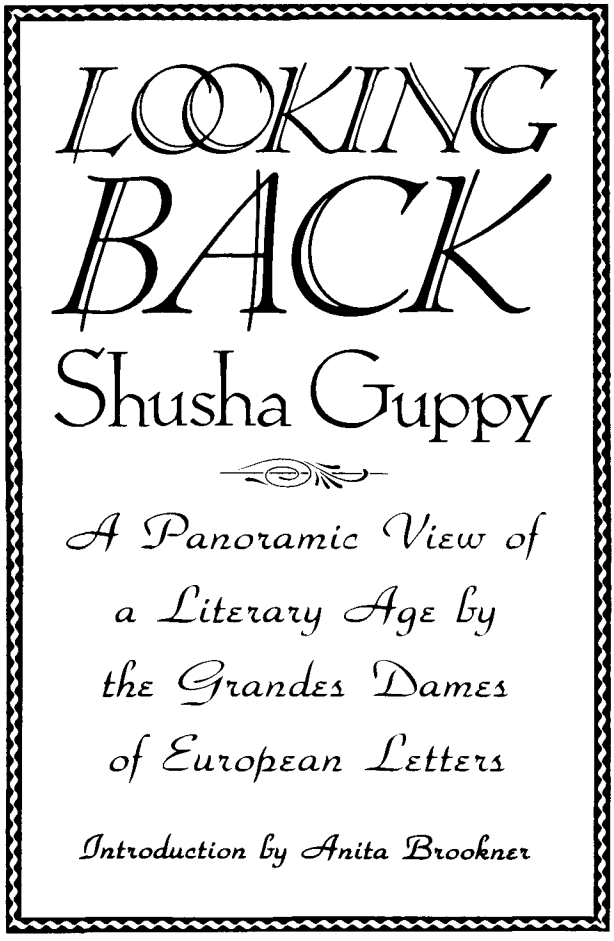

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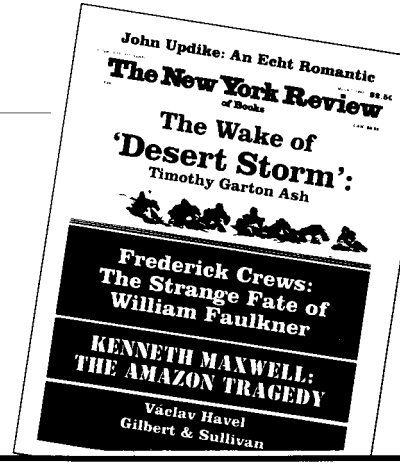
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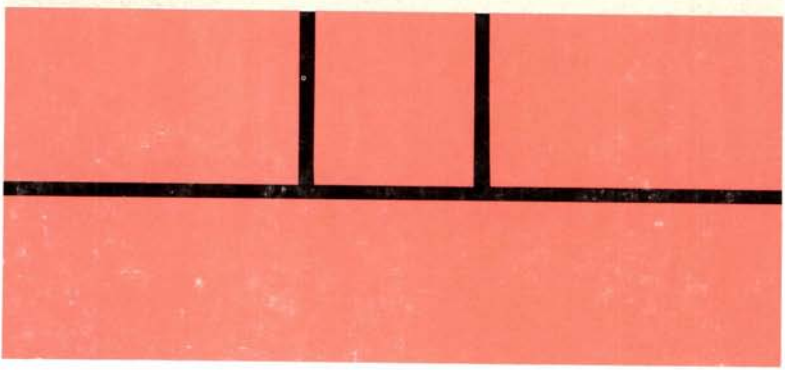

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